

To: Dr. Dave Palzet, Superintendent
From: Griffin L. Sonntag, Business Manager/CSBO/Director of Transportation
Date: November 8, 2023
RE: School Year 2023-2024 Transportation Update

Summary

We are working extremely hard with our partners at First Student to create the optimal transportation experience for the students and families of Pleasantdale. From improved arrival and departure rates, better communication from First Student, kindergartener home stops, and late bus assigned only to one school, the improvements that we have made in my first year and a half of serving in this role are accomplishments I am proud of for our families. We ask our students to do their best every day and our students deserve our best in all areas, including transportation, in return.

Much work has gone into creating the most reliable bus transportation for our students and families for the 2023-2024 school year. While transportation reliability has been far from perfect, the improvement from the last year is night and day and can be attributed to many factors that I'd like to briefly outline below:

1. Hard Work on the Front End

This hard work involved setting deadlines for receiving draft routes, personally driving these routes, and making notes of questions and concerns, encouraging drivers to make at least two "dry runs" of their routes before the first day of school, meeting with First Student after week one to go over specific trouble areas, hosting our annual "Pleasantdale Loves Our Bus Drivers" meeting providing an opportunity for two-way communication with the drivers and management.

2. Listening to Families

Even with all the front-end planning, inevitably there will be questions, concerns, or issues that impact our students and their families. Providing a Google Form for families to share their observations and suggestions was a valuable tool. This Form is still open and shared in the Principal's Newsletters. To date, I have received and responded to 75 situations brought to my attention in the form.

3. Improved Communication Systems with Families

Each morning at approximately 6:30 a.m., the building secretaries, principals, and I receive an email from the First Student Hodgkins branch manager with any potential late buses for the morning. From here, the school secretaries and/or principals communicate with the families on that bus through our Skylert text messaging system. This message alerts families that First Student anticipates their child's bus will be running X number of minutes late so they can plan accordingly. This communication system supports our families as best as we can in a situation that can be challenging and stressful by letting them know as early as possible.

4. Continued and Frequent Meetings with First Student

I continue to meet with First Student every two weeks to review the past two week's performance, discuss any ongoing issues, and plan for any future concerns. These meetings have



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been very productive and show a commitment by us and First Student to provide the most reliable transportation possible for our students and their families. We have also learned about drivers being removed, vacations, or FMLA situations which all put stress on a system that is still operating with less than the optimal number of drivers available on a daily basis.

5. Accountability

As you may recall, penalties were negotiated and added to our contract for this year. These penalties only take effect if First Student does not fulfill their obligations to our students and families. These included:

1. 50% route rate reduction for each regular morning route that arrives at school after the school starting time.
2. 50% route rate reduction for each regular afternoon route which is started after the school dismissal time.
3. 30% route rate reduction for a route that has missed stops more than one time in a given week.
4. 50% route rate reduction for a route that has missed stop more than one time in a given week for three or more weeks.
5. 100% route rate reduction for a morning or afternoon route that was uncovered/missed.
6. 45% route rate reduction for routes in which notice is not provided to the schools via email at least 1 hour prior to the start time of school or dismissal time of school if a bus route will be starting its route 15 minutes or more after its regular scheduled start time.

Penalties Impact as of October 31, 2023

Through the first two and a half months of the school year, I have submitted credits for our First Student transportation bills for **\$4,622.63**.

In most cases, these are attributed to #2 above where First Student has a driver or two call off in the afternoon and they do not have the personnel to cover the route. Unfortunately, the usual solution implemented is to have a driver run their regular route on time and then circle back to the school to pick up the uncovered route. Often these routes then leave the schools about 30 minutes after their typical time. On the positive side, First Student has been much improved with their communication when this occurs. They usually inform us more than an hour ahead of time so we can notify parents in case they would like to make different arrangements home for their child.

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Conclusion and Next Steps

Overall, First Student the routes have run correctly and on-time 95% of the time so far this year. With continued communication and diligence, we expect this number to rise throughout the remained of the school year.

An important next step is to continue to investigate First Student's bus tracking system, First View. As mentioned previously, the concept of this added feature is exciting, however, its positive implementation requires accuracy and reliability on the part of First Student. I plan to meet with their FirstView team again soon and will report an update to the Board at the Board meeting.

Finally, I want to thank First Student for their work to meet our needs this year. In addition, I want to thank our secretaries and principals at each school for their efforts and support. This is a team effort and Pleasantdale has a great team advocating for our students and families.