



May 29, 2018

Greetings,

The Duluth Public Schools Head Start Program has an opportunity to provide transportation to 4 year olds enrolled in Head Start on school district buses during the upcoming school year. This would mark the second year of this waiver as we received a waiver for the 2017-2018 school year. This opportunity is a result of our district receiving State funded Voluntary PreK dollars to serve 4 year olds. In Minnesota, that means districts essentially are adding another grade to the K-12 system. Voluntary Preschool funding is treated the same as all other grades meaning the students in that program generate both special education and transportation dollars. Currently, we have no other busing or transportation available.

Our program plans for 2018-2019 include continuing to blend our classrooms with School Readiness and Voluntary Preschool in both our double session and full day options. Children in Voluntary Preschool ride the bus from a corner stop near their home or childcare with K-5<sup>th</sup> grade students. These 4-year-old children sit in the front of the bus, are not using restraints and do not have a bus monitor. They must comply with all bus safety regulations for behavior and unlike their older fellow riders, an adult must meet the 4 year old at the corner stop at the end of the day. Failure to do so results in the child being returned to the school where the classroom staffs work to reach the parent or an emergency contact to pick up the child. Our

district transportation staff has seen very few problems with 4 year olds on the K-5 buses this year. The older students are protective of the younger ones and often help them on and off the buses. As we try to remove barriers to enrollment for Head Start families, we need this waiver to allow 4-year-old Head Start children to ride the bus just like their Voluntary Preschool and School Readiness age mates.

To be clear, this busing opportunity is only for children who are 4 by September 1<sup>st</sup> and are enrolled with Head Start dollars. We propose to waive the regulations for restraints 1303.71(d) and 1303.72(a) (1) and monitors 1303.72(a) (4). We believe this is in the best interest of the Head Start children and families we serve and would significantly reduce the barriers to enrollment and improve attendance. We have seen attendance percentages increase this past year because of busing. Our Policy Council supports this plan contingent on establishing and implementing the following safety measures.

1. 4-year-old Head Start children riding the bus to and from school would sit in the first few rows of seats closest to the driver.
2. An adult must meet 4-year-old Head Start children riding the bus home from school. If the adult is not the child's parent, it must be someone who the parent designates may take the child home from the bus stop.
3. All Head Start 4 year olds must participate in a bus safety presentation on the first day of school.
4. This is voluntary, so parents who are uncomfortable putting their Head Start 4 year old on a bus can still choose to do self-transport.

We urge you to act swiftly so that we have the opportunity to provide access to Head Start for the families most in need of our services. Your fast action will allow us enough time to

plan and execute our safety trainings and ensure drivers, teachers, parents and staff are all prepared for Head Start 4 year olds riding the bus. We have seen how this waiver has improved attendance, ensuring more 4 year olds can get to school during the critical year before kindergarten. Further, granting this waiver will greatly reduce the burden on parents and caregivers who are responsible for getting their children to and from school.

We will upload Policy Council and Governing Board approvals as they are received.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

*Pam Rees*

Pam Rees  
Director, Duluth Public Schools Head Start  
2102 N. Blackman Ave.  
Duluth MN 55811  
218-336-8815  
Pamela.Rees@isd709.org