



Memo

To: Superintendent Steve Heil, School Board
From: Paul Durbahn, Executive Director of Finance and Operations
Date: July 17th, 2025
Re: Southwest Middle School and Sibley Elementary Walk Zone

At the July 21st board meeting we will be adding an agenda item seeking approval to provide bussing services to an area that is within a designated walk zone per board Policy 707. The rationale for this request for extension of services is due to an increasing concern to the safety of an intersection for students walking to school. Currently, this decision will impact 15 students who currently are assigned to walk to school: 13 elementary and 2 middle school students. Ten of those students are in grades Kindergarten, 1st, or 2nd.

The intersection that has been deemed a safety concern is the crossing of State Highway 69 near the intersection of West Front Street. Students walk to Sibley and SWMS at this location. There are overhead flashing amber lights and we do have a crossing guard, however, there is an increasing concern with the speed of traffic in this area and our ability to control those patterns. Local public officials have expressed concerns and as our administration observes the crossing we feel it is an unsafe location. We are in conversation with Freeborn County Emergency Management, Albert Lea Public Safety, the City of Albert Lea Engineering Department, and MNDOT in efforts to bring a safer egress for walkers/cyclists at this location. However, a solution won't likely be resolved in the short term.

We are asking for board temporary approval, to provide transportation to elementary and middle school students who live in the neighborhood bound by State Highway 69, W. Main Street (County Road 46), Wedgewood Rd, and W. Front Street (extended to the West of Highway 69 to Wedgewood Rd). This temporary approval would be for two school years, through the 2026-2027 school year, which would allow time for all municipalities and Albert Lea Bus to continue to partner towards a solution.

Albert Lea Bus Company has been supportive in this conversation and have agreed to provide those bus services without amendment to the current contract/pricing during this temporary adjustment. Approval of this adjustment will not impact our budget.

We are continuing to review our walk zones and our safe routes to school, annually. It is not regular practice to adjust the walk zones, and it is my recommendation, that at this time we limit this exception only to the area defined above. It is important to provide our community clear processes and consistent enforcement. Further changes may also have a financial impact. Concerns about walk zones should be directed to our office for review; however, we are bound to policy and statute and we will stay withing those board expectations while we communicate.

Please contact me with any questions.