



PARKROSE SCHOOL DISTRICT
10636 Northeast Prescott Street
Portland, OR 97220
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www.parkrose.k12.or.us

Michael Lopes Serrao
Superintendent

DRAFT

To: Oregon State Board of Education
Colt Gill, Director of Oregon Department of Education
Date: January 12th, 2022

**RE: OAR 581-023-0040 Approved Transportation Costs for Payments from the State School Fund.
Reimburse district for transportation costs for students under supplemental plan impacted by lack of bus drivers.**

The Parkrose School District is located in Northeast Portland and serves one of the most diverse communities in our state. Our section of the city lacks safe routes to school for many students. About 70% of Parkrose School District is represented by historically underserved families.

Our school district has had a board-approved supplemental transportation plan to transport some students who live within the state-required 1 mile limit for elementary students and 1.5 mile limit for secondary students (ORS 327.043). Our supplemental plan has been in place for more than 20 years due to many walking routes to school being unsafe because of the lack of sidewalks and safe crossing routes across busy roads and intersections.

In February 2021 our board reluctantly voted to modify this plan due to our inability to transport most of the students in the supplemental plan because of our lack of bus drivers. We could only maintain service to one of the *most* unsafe routes within a mile of one of our elementary schools. This decision impacted more than 500 students that were served under the supplemental transportation plan. This was very difficult news to share with our families as many do not have other options for transportation to and from school.

This was not an easy decision for our board because they understand the inequity of support to our families. The lack of bus drivers is an issue that has plagued districts across the state. The COVID-19 Pandemic has only exacerbated the struggle to recruit and retain bus drivers. But our families cannot control the safety of the routes to school and they do not all have alternative means of transportation.

Our city has made efforts to improve routes to school over the past 15 years. However, we still have many routes without sidewalks and safe crossing routes, and some routes face poor conditions such as houseless communities and underpasses where trash and needles may sit for weeks until they can be cleaned.

We realize that our previous full supplemental plan is needed for our students, but do not have the bus drivers to expand our routes as needed. We have received state school fund transportation grant funding for more than 20 years to serve this supplemental plan, but we faced a school year where we could not serve these routes.



*Every child reads, thinks critically, and graduates ready for college and career.
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I committed to our board that I would find alternatives to try and support our affected families. We have joined with Metro, City of Portland, and Oregon Walks to begin a walking greeter program to help students get to school safely. This is being done through a grant at Metro. In addition, we partnered with Tri-met, our local public transit agency to provide our high school students with Tri-met passes this year. We are using ESSER funding to pay for these costs. Unfortunately, these are all short-term because we are using one-time funding to alleviate the pressure we have placed on families who need our support.

My request is to allow for state transportation school fund reimbursement for students who would qualify under our former supplemental transportation plan, using alternative forms of transportation support. I recognize that all school districts draw transportation costs from the state school fund. However, we have been reimbursed for the past 20 years for those costs when we had available drivers to cover the routes.

This is particularly important because I know our local board and the state board are using an equity lens to make decisions about the support and services we provide our families. It is currently an allowable use of State School Fund Transportation monies to reimburse families who drive their children to school, but we have no such support in helping our families who must rely on public transit. This seems a prime example of falling short of meeting the unique needs of our historically underserved communities. I hope to be a voice for our affected families.

In addition, there are two large school districts in our state that are allowed to request reimbursement for state school fund dollars due to being grandfathered into the new statute on transportation funding. One of them is our neighbor Portland Public Schools. They receive reimbursement for purchasing public transportation passes for students who qualify for transportation. We ask that we be recognized for our own unique barriers and receive support for our families.

While we are looking at currently-reimbursable options like using Type 10 vehicles, we want to employ other innovative strategies like walking greeters and buying public transportation passes to support impacted families. We are very appreciative of your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Lopes Serrao".

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Superintendent



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