



September 9, 2019

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 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 plan blends 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-5th 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 1st 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 approve the waiver to provide access to Head Start families most in need of our services. Transportation is a tremendous barrier for families with young children living in Duluth. As we work to close the achievement gap in our district, let us be mindful of that.

Respectfully, Sherry Williams, Director, Duluth Public Schools Head Start

