

Pleasantdale Elementary School
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Pleasantdale Middle School
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Pleasantdale School District 107 | 7450 S. Wolf Road | Burr Ridge, IL 60527 | 708.784.2013 | Fax: 708.246.0161 | www.d107.org

To: Dr. Dave Palzet, Superintendent
From: Griffin L. Sonntag, Business Manager/CSBO/Director of Transportation
Re: Transportation Executive Summary
Date: February 1, 2023

Background:

The district, along with Western Springs 101, LaGrange 102, Lyons 103, LaGrange (South), 105, and Lyons Township High School 204, contracted with First Student Transportation in 2008. The original contract was for a term of three years. School Code allows school districts to renew contracts on a yearly basis after the original contract term expires. The district has renewed the contract every year since the original contract sunset. The district provides transportation to all students in Kindergarten through 8th grade free of charge. Over the course of our relationship with First Student, we have operated between 6 and 9 bus routes per school. This year, the district operates six routes at each school during the AM and PM. Additionally, the district offers a late bus at each school for students that stay at school past the regular dismissal time. Our routes are “paired” routes which means that our drivers often complete routes for other districts before coming to Pleasantdale to run our routes. This allows us to realize a significant savings in transportation costs. Ridership in the district fluctuates over the course of the year, from a low of approximately 40% to a high of nearly 80%.

Current State of Transportation:

This year, the district operates six AM and PM routes at each school. At the beginning of each year, we expect some inconsistencies as drivers learn new routes and get to know their riders. This year, we found that these disruptions lasted well past when we would have expected them to normalize. We also realized that the transportation industry was not immune to the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which resulted in a significant shortage of drivers. In addition, two of our drivers had a long-term illness or injury that required a sub-driver to be assigned to these routes. When a sub is assigned, it is often a different driver each day. This resulted in additional delays and inconsistencies in service. The administrative team has worked to hold First Student accountable and ensure the best service possible. We’ve made morning calls to the Hodgkins dispatch center and will frequently check in via text with individual drivers. Additionally, the administration reviewed and reconfigured the routes at the start of the year with First Student to be more efficient and ensure a more timely pick-up/drop-off. As a convenience to parents, we have implemented systems to notify parents when routes will be late. These notifications come in the form of text messages, emails, and/or phone calls. Even with these interventions and systems in place, it has taken longer for our transportation issues to be resolved. We continue to work closely with First Student to monitor and improve the service they provide our students and families.

Future Improvement/Planning:

As we look ahead to next year and beyond, we are using this year’s situation as a learning experience for the future. We intend to begin the routing process earlier to review routes well before the start of the school year. We will be requesting additional routes for both the elementary and middle school in order to shorten the time the students are on the bus. We are reviewing the feasibility of having the late routes be separated by school instead of by geography within the district. Additionally, we will demand that First Student drivers practice their routes multiple times prior to the start of the year. Currently, drivers practice their routes at least one time before the start of the year. We have also been working

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with First Student to allow our maintenance staff with the required training to obtain a CDL license. This would allow our custodians and maintenance staff to drive routes if a regular driver is unavailable. Likewise, it could allow our staff to drive field trip routes and athletic routes.

Finally, we have been keeping a close watch on First Student's bus tracking app, *FirstView*. Based on information on First Student's website: *FirstView*® gives you real-time tracking so you can view your entire transportation system in one view and on one screen. The *FirstView Parent App* gives caregivers peace of mind knowing where their child's bus is. It's also a convenient way to communicate with parents through push-messages. Dr. Palzet and I met with members of the First Student team responsible for deploying *FirstView*. At that meeting, the representatives explained that the Hodgkins location would be responsible to ensure that the tracking systems are connected to the correct buses. When we asked about the structures and systems in place to do this, especially with a substitute driver or a different bus than usual for a particular route, we were told that those systems are currently being put in place. They also discussed the fact because we have paired routes with other local districts, they are working to improve their accuracy at this point. User feedback of the app is also not positive. Using the website justuseapp.com we found that the *FirstView* app received 5530 reviews with 73.6% of the reviews rating the app as negative and 26.4% of the respondents rating the app as positive experience. While we do believe that First Student is making good progress improving the app and the implementation of *FirstView*, we recommend waiting to implement this system until it is able to provide more consistent information to users.