

Transportation Update

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Agenda



- **Strategic Support Team Overview**
- **Background**
- **Commendations**
- **Findings/Key Areas of Need**
- **Key Recommendations**
- **Questions and Answers**



Background



- All transportation services are outsourced.
- A vendor new to the district was awarded a three-year 276-school bus contract, starting July 1, 2022, and ending June 30, 2025.
- The vendor was also contracted to provide the routing of buses, which the vendor assigned to a third-party using software licenses owned by the district.
- The school bus vendor started the first contract year significantly short of certified school bus drivers, resulting in multiple schools and many students not receiving school bus transportation services for the first few months at the start of the school year.



Background



- On average, approximately 8,500 of the 15,500 transportation-eligible students make use of district-provided transportation each day.
- SLPS contracted with two (2) taxicab companies and eleven (11) alternate transportation companies during the first several months of the 2022-2023 school year.
- SLPS uses a modified three-tier bell schedule model for school start and end times (Five different bell schedules). A three-tier system allows buses to be used more effectively as fewer buses are required.



Commendations



- **Principals:**
 - rated the transportation division staff **highly responsive to concerns.**
 - shared their **appreciation** that school **bus video footage was timely received.**
- District staff interviewed are very committed to meeting the challenge and recognize their role and importance in improving student outcomes.
- **SLPS scored in the "best quartile"** on two (2) 2020-2021 CGCS Managing for Results Transportation Operations Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

2020-2021 Key Performance Indicator	St. Louis	CGCS Median	Note
Bus Fleet - Daily Buses as Percent of Total Buses	91.08%	81.22%	Best Quartile
Bus Usage - Daily Runs Per Bus	6.2174	4.4604	Best Quartile



Findings – Leadership and Management



- DoT internal **staffing levels were inadequate for proper contract administration** and proper oversight monitoring. In particular, the tracking and monitoring of --
 - The **adherence to contractual terms** to ensure that the contractor is fulfilling all contractual obligations (e.g., on-time performance, vehicle standards, pricing);
 - Quality assurance and performance metrics with **regular monitoring and evaluation of the contractor's performance against these metrics** (e.g., timely pickup and delivery, expediting adding new students to buses)
 - **Compliance with legal and regulatory requirements** to verify that the contractor is complying with all applicable laws, regulations, and industry standards, including areas such as occupational health and safety, environmental regulations, licensing, insurance, drug testing, and all other relevant legal obligations;





Findings – Leadership and Management

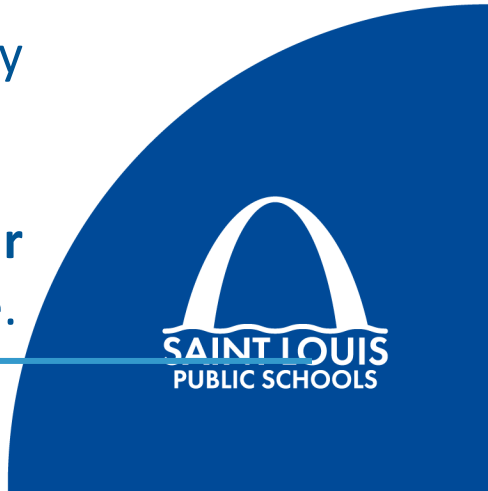
- Contract administration and oversight continued --
 - **Financial and contractual transparency** to closely monitor financial transactions and ensure transparency and accuracy in billing, invoicing, and cost reporting;
 - **Data security**, student information confidentiality, unauthorized access to student data, and data protection protocols are in place;
 - **Performance and compliance for annual evaluation of services** provided to assess the contractor's performance against established criteria; and
 - **Student and bus safety** by verifying the following: daily bus inspection compliance, driver check rides, driver training activities, vehicle maintenance, preventable accident accountability and follow-up, ongoing ridership monitoring to optimize bus routes, and district staff presence at bus stops and school site loading and unloading zones.





Findings – Leadership and Management

- A **potential conflict exists** when the same vendor creates the routes and bills for the number of buses used.
- The team was told that a **lack of communication exists between the contractor, their staff, and their customers.** For example--
 - The contractually required **call center and call tracking metrics were disbanded**, which has negatively impacted communication, especially timely communication to parents and schools).
 - **Principals** shared that **communication with the vendor was poor**, especially notifications regarding buses that were running late and related information.
 - The team heard from **contractor employees that they do not have a regular meeting cadence** to provide feedback to address service issues and improve service.





Findings – Leadership and Management

- There was no indication that **formal interdepartmental annual route planning meetings existed** that integrated input from essential stakeholder offices (typically Special Education, Student Assignment, Information Technology, McKinney-Vento, Foster Care Services, Communications, Safety and Security, Transportation, Enrollment Planning, School Choice, etc.).
- During a site visit to one of the contractor bus yards, the team observed or was told that --
 - The **vendor was unprepared** (lack of drivers, lack of fleet maintenance staff, and the lack of an appropriate functional garage facility at one of the bus park locations) to take on this contract at the start of the school year and is still not adequately prepared.
 - The **garage was in disarray and appeared unorganized.**





Pictures from SLPS Bus Garage





Pictures from a Peer District Bus Garage



Findings – Leadership and Management



➤ Site visit observations continued --

- The **garage lacked critical equipment**, including an adequate number of jacks, jack stands, and air compressor(s) with appropriate capacity.
- **Attendance among bus drivers was poor**, and drivers were not held accountable for their absences.
- **Driver training was not well structured** and depended on third-party video training of new drivers vs. hands-on training, and no specific SWD training by appropriate district staff for drivers regarding needs and attitudes towards special needs students took place.
- The **contractor did not have enough mechanics to maintain all school buses** in a safe and proper mechanical condition - as evidenced by the number of vehicles out of service noted on the dispatch office board as "down" at our visit.



Findings – Leadership and Management



- The district included performance penalties within the school bus vendor contract for crucial service deliverables to ensure that services were performed and maintained at the highest level. However, **performance penalties cannot exceed \$5,000 per calendar month.**
- The team reviewed **extraordinarily high percentages (49.4%) of buses not passing Missouri's annual school bus state inspections** compared to other state and CGCS member districts. The median CGCS 2021 KPI score and Missouri State results for buses that failed inspection on the first inspection is less than 10 percent.
- The team was **unable to verify that cabs and alternative transportation companies had a comprehensive process for training third-party drivers** on SLPS transportation policies and protocols.



Findings – Organization and Operations



- The district lacks a **centralized contract compliance office** that is needed for internal control to monitor the management of contracted services. Although the district has a procurement position titled *Contract Compliance Specialist*, per that position summary, this position is responsible for performing contract assignments and procurement procedures, not contract administration and compliance.
- Principals interviewed noted that --
 - Current **contractor leadership never visited their schools**, which hindered relationship-building with the new vendor. Further, **telephone calls go unanswered**, or if they are answered, **call center staff can not assist since the staff "were not properly trained."**
 - Buses are **always late**, and **notifications for late-running buses were effectively nonexistent.**



Findings – Organization and Operations



- Principal feedback continued --
 - **Drivers are often no-shows on paydays**, with high driver absences on Mondays, Fridays, and the days before and after holidays.
 - **"We are under more stress due to transportation problems, and parents have shared they are very disappointed in bus service."**
 - The **application that parents use to track the bus was unavailable most of the school year**, and much of the data was incorrect when working.
 - **Field trip confirmations** are not always forwarded to schools
 - Although contractor staff shared that parents and school officials are notified via email of late buses, principals interviewed indicated **they had not received these email notifications.**



Findings – Organization and Operations



- **SLPS DoT staff do not have the same access as the contractor to the GPS software and the Parent Portal Tracker systems, as specified in the contract.**
- **The team heard conflicting information on when new students were placed on a bus.** For example, the Office of Special Education shared that adding a student takes 7 to 14 days. However, principals reported that it's an automatic two (2) weeks, and staff shared that it could be much less depending on when the student registered. Currently, CGCS's KPI for adding an SWD is 4.5 days.
- **Transportation is not present at IEP meetings** when special services, specialized equipment (i.e., wheelchairs, oxygen), or exceptional circumstances (dead-end or one-way street) to ensure the appropriate bus is assigned to meet students' needs the first day transportation is scheduled.



Findings – Organization and Operations



- **The DoT lacked a formalized process to monitor and effectively utilize ridership and current bus capacity data** throughout the school year to contain or reduce transportation costs.
- **Routes were built on eligibility rather than average ridership**, resulting in additional and unnecessary buses and costs. The DoT holds seats for 100 percent of the transportation-eligible students, even though historically, at least 25 percent of these students have never or no longer ride the bus.
- **DoT does not follow the best practice of receiving nightly student information system updates** that impact transportation. Currently, the DoT receives only weekly updates.



Findings – Organization and Operations



- **On-time school bus arrival last school year was reported in the 85 percent range.** Afternoon on-time departure was approximately 90 percent. These percentages are far below the current combined CGCS median of 99.95 percent on-time performance.
- **SLPS Cost per Bus** (contractor operated) of \$113,230 was significantly higher (97 percent higher) than the CGCS national median of \$57,612.20, and **SLPS Cost per Mile Operated** of \$19.01 was strikingly higher (150 percent higher) than the CGCS national median of \$7.59.



Recommendations

- Convene, with a sense of urgency, a **task force with representatives from transportation, procurement, and other offices as appropriate to carefully review all terms and conditions of the current school bus contract.** Identify the specific performance expectations, deliverables, timelines, and any clauses related to non-performance or breach of contract. Develop a comprehensive list of non-compliant issues, their impacts on SLPS and its students, and potential contract amendments to enhance contractor performance..
- Schedule a **meeting with the President/CEO of the current school bus contract company** to discuss the failures SLPS and its students are experiencing and to **implement a performance improvement plan to correct performance failures outlining specific steps and a timeline** to ensure progress toward goals.





Recommendations

- **Communicate with stakeholders by informing parents, school administrators, and other relevant stakeholders about the situation** and steps taken to address the bus contractor's performance issues.
- **Consider conducting a comprehensive staffing study** of the Division of Transportation to ensure that robust contract monitoring and oversight are achievable. Consider creating an SLPS central office function whose primary responsibility is to monitor district contract management, deliverables, compliance, and best practices.
- Establish an **annual interdepartmental routing timeline committee** that will develop appropriate and acceptable deadlines for the submission of data and completion of tasks. This committee shall comprise staff from Special Education, Student Assignment, Information Technology, McKinney-Vento, Foster Care Services, Enrollment Planning, DoT, and others as appropriate.



Recommendations

- Examine and prepare a **business case justification for bringing the routing function in-house** to improve routing outcomes.
- Create a **committee comprised of leaders from transportation and the Office of Special Education to confer regularly** on issues of mutual concern. Establish when a transportation representative should be present at an IEP meeting to discuss specialized equipment or services a student requires.
- Design a strategy to **monitor actual daily ridership** throughout the school year to aggressively identify stops, runs, and buses that can be consolidated or eliminated.
- Implement programs to **measure customer satisfaction** (customer surveys and focus groups) from parents, students, school administrators, teachers on field trips, athletic directors, and coaches to identify service concerns and establish future priorities.





Thank You

Questions and Answers





BOARD OF EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION UPDATE



JANUARY 9, 2024



BREAKING NEWS!!



EPA announces \$1 billion in grant funding for electric school buses

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced nearly \$1 billion in grant funding for electric school buses across the US – enough for more than 2,700 clean buses.

The projects are in partnership with Highland Electric and will engage utilities, charging infrastructure and bus manufactures to deliver operational electric buses over the next 12-18 months. Project aspects include driver and technician training, community education and ongoing infrastructure monitoring and support.

SLPS/MCSB has been awarded 30 School Buses

Congratulations!

More information to come!



Success will only come through cooperation and partnership



MAY '23 MEETING



May 2023 MCSB leadership (Region Manager & CEO) met with senior SLPS leadership including President & VP of Board addressing concerns and discussing action plans.

- Presented Actions, and outline
- Reorganized Call Center structure and placement
- Addressed local management challenges (changes made)
- The addition of 2 Dispatchers
- The addition of Trip Supervisor
- HCTB Parent Apps is up to 4,899, up from last year 2,705
- Recruit, Recruit, Recruit
- GPS Bus/Route Labeling
- MCSB made the decision that staff changes were needed in hopes to improve the communication.
- Discussed several items and challenges
- Challenge remains Driver supply contributed by Absenteeism.
- Follow up meeting with Superintendent, CEO, Key SLPS Team (10/3/23)



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KEY POINTS IN REPORT



The vendor was unprepared (lack of drivers, lack of fleet maintenance staff, and lack of facility readiness.....

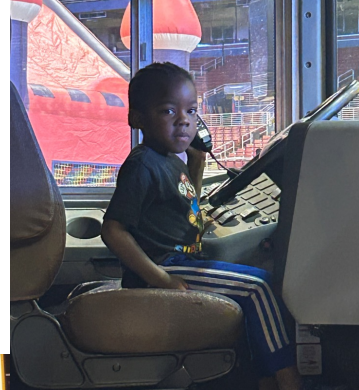
- Driver supply and Tech shortage is no secret and have been communicated throughout the partnership. , in addition maintenance staff has been challenged to get to full capacity..
- Recruiting Efforts have been non-stop for Drivers, Monitors, and Technicians.
 - We increased drivers wages 25%, and 68% since 2020
 - We increased technicians' wages over 35%
 - Technician incentives include Boot & Tool Allowance, Inspector License, and up to \$3.00 increase for ASE certifications
 - Multiple radio, TV, Billboard, KMOV, KSDK, 100.3 campaigns
 - Several Job fairs, Back2School Expo, Social Media, etc.
 - MCSB has invested over \$120,000 on recruiting efforts, advertising, etc.
- Driver Turnover is running 35%, last year 42%
- Management shortfalls (replaced 4 management positions)
- MCSB is sitting in a much better place today



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Back 2 School Expo '23



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ATTENDANCE



Row Labels	Average of Day Rate	Max of AM Rate	Max of PM Rate	Count of Day	AM/PM excess 10%	AM/PM Shifts	% Excess 10%
Monday	9.1%	16.3%	13.8%	16	13	32	40.6%
Tuesday	8.7%	14.7%	13.6%	16	11	32	34.4%
Wednesday	8.7%	13.6%	11.6%	16	6	32	18.8%
Thursday	9.3%	13.3%	12.8%	16	15	32	46.9%
Friday	9.8%	14.9%	15.7%	12	11	24	45.8%
					56	152	36.8%

- Rates are averaging 9.5% today, before winter weather hits
- 7%-9% could be considered acceptable for large locations
- Current spare size 11%
- Challenge is getting experienced drivers to spare positions
 - Exploring avenues to recruit current drivers to move from route to spare
 - Considering increasing hours
 - Considering adding additional paid days
- We are finding that as wages increase the threshold for a driver's personal bars have lowered, meaning they earn more for less time, add the availability to earn extra money with things like Door dash, Uber, etc.



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KEY POINTS IN REPORT



1. *The Contractor did not have enough mechanics to maintain all school buses.....*
2. *The team reviewed extraordinarily high percentages of buses not passing Missouri's annual school bus inspections.....*

MCSB invested time, resources and financial support (excess of \$500,000), plus added out-of-town techs, and increased overtime to tackle the shortage in Technicians, the good news is that we are have significantly increased our tech count, we are short just 3 technicians today. Due to ongoing constraints vehicle production we were dependent on limited used fleet purchases that required greater maintenance than expected. In addition, we have experienced material shortages from supply chain challenges. MCSB purchase an additional 15 buses to support the fleets, today we have 231 routes with 265 total buses (15%)

Efforts have been underway since the inspections ended last year, and we have taken several steps in addressing the challenges from last year and working to prepare for the spring inspections. Several of the efforts undertaken were.

- Increased significantly the wages for tech in St. Louis to \$34/hr
- Added incentives to work for MCSB such as a tool allowance and boot allowance.
- Introduced an opportunity to earn even more in wages by becoming ASE certified, a technician can increase their wage by \$3/hour.

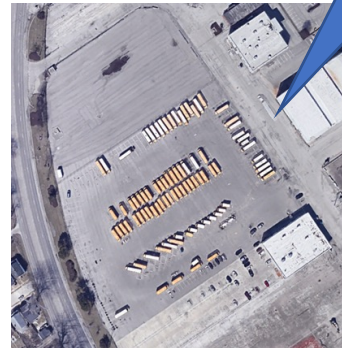
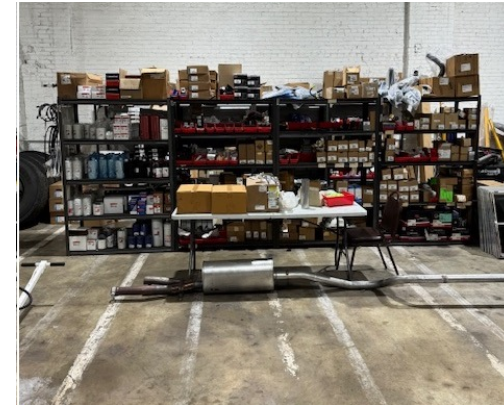
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ • Changes to Maintenance Leadership



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KEY POINTS IN REPORT



SLPS-North (Hall) Lot
8000 Hall Street
150 Buses
Routes = 2000

SLPS-Spring Lot
700 Spring Street
110 Buses
Routes = 1000





Focus on the future



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Projects, Tasks, planning



➤ Technology

- GPS upgrades are in process, hardware has arrived and installs is occurring, including Tablets. Timeline 02/20/2024
- Bus Bulletin contract signed, training sessions occurring should roll out very soon. Timeline 01/19/2024
- HCTB Parent Apps is up to 4,899, up from last year 2,705
- Long Term-MCSB evaluating Dispatch/Ops System

➤ Operations

- MCSB is preparing for the return of routes that were temporary assigned from the District. Timeline 2/1/2024.
- MCSB is providing shuttles after holiday between NCSHS to Stevens MS. Timeline 1/3/2024
- Customer service training for staff (on-going)
- Exploring feasibility and cost associated with recruitment of spare drivers, could include added benefits, paid days, out of box approaches
 - In other words, we are not sitting around hoping for change
- Made changes in staff both in Operations & Maintenance



PROJECTS, TASKS, PLANNING



- Communication
 - MCSB & SLPS have a daily (10:00am) operations call with leadership between MCSB & SLPS transportation.
 - MCSB & SLPS meets monthly to report out operations data (MJR Report)
 - MCSB Transportation team meet weekly
 - Call Center was restructured in 23/24
 - Call Center (10 Agents) staffed August 1st - December 19th
 - Call Agents (2) assigned to support location dispatch till not needed

- Electric Vehicle (School Bus) **Update – Awarded 30 Buses**
 - NAC is working Highland on leading our EV grant
 - Communications with SLPS regarding Grant application

- Key to success – Hire Drivers!!



Success will only come through cooperation and partnership



Thank You



Success is all about driver recruitment & retention, more drivers means better service!



Semester 1 Update



- Focus Groups
 - Parent Action Council (PAC) Meetings
 - Surveys
- Performance Improvement Plan
 - Establish expectations
 - Daily meetings
 - Monthly Joint Review (MJR)



Semester 2 Look Ahead



- Development of Alternative Transportation Request For Proposal (RFP)
- Transportation Task Force
 - Transit opportunity analysis
 - Bell time analysis
 - Resource planning services
 - Innovative solutions
 - Surveys
- Technology
- Parent Action Council (PAC) Meeting
- Summer School Planning





Transportation



Questions?

