



## **School Transportation Task Force Agenda**

August 13th, 2024 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

[SB23-094](#)

**Task Force Members Present:** Erin Camper, Brenda Dickhoner, Robert DiPietro, Morgan Judge, Amy Lloyd, Nicholas Martinez, Jessica Morrison, Stephanie Hansen, Kaycee Headrick, Trevor Byrne, Micheal Madden, Chad Miller, Joel Newton, Leiton Powell, Albert Samora, Sarah Swanson, Casey Ungs, David Werner, Kevin Vick, Michelle Exstrom, Jen Douglas

**Task Force Members Absent:** Dustin Kress, Daine Shiele, Jana Schleusner, Steve McCracken, Dave Slothower, Debra Johnson

**Facilitator, & Support:** *Dillinger Research and Applied Data-* Kate McDonald, Sarah Sullivan, *Colorado Department of Education-* Susan Miller, Jennifer Okes

**Attendees:** Allison Nicotera, Fred Stewart, Rich Hull, Yolanda Lucero

### **Welcome and Agenda Review**

- Meeting started at 10:02 because the group was waiting for quorum.
- Kate reviewed the agenda items (slide 3), guidelines for interactions, deliberation, and collaboration (slide 4), and design thinking (slide 5).

### **Agenda Item- Data Collection Update**

- Kate mentioned that at the September 5th meeting the group would be discussing transportation funding and the reimbursement process. Since first discussing the topic in February the Finance Department has updated budget estimates of the FPP Subcommittee Models and those would be reviewed at the meeting on the 5th (slide 6).
- Kate reviewed the project plan and mentioned to the group that an additional meeting to replace the July meeting would be held on Monday September 23rd from 10AM-1PM (slide 7)
- Kate then reviewed the overall charge of the task force, the previously agreed upon minimum requirements that would be discussed today regarding eligibility and utilization (slides 8-12).

### **Agenda Item- Review of Transportation Requirements**

- Kate reviewed federal transportation requirements with the group and reminded the group that transportation was only required for a subset of students including those with special needs, students who are homeless, and students living in foster care (slide 13).
- Kate reviewed state transportation requirements with the group and reminded them that beyond the student group that were required to be transported, all other students in the state could be transported by the district but were not required to be transported by the district (slides 14-16).

### **Agenda Item- Walk-Zones**

- Kate reviewed the minimum requirements determined by the Task Force in April with regards to walk-zones, reviewed state requirements, and then reviewed data collected from districts and families regarding walk-zones (slides 18-21)
- Susan reminded the group that walk-zones are not required to have a sidewalk.
- Michelle asked if there was standard guidance for school districts to work with when developing walk-zones and if so who created the guidance.
- Nicholas also asked whether there were rules regarding what would be considered a barrier to a walk-zone.
- Susan indicated that there are factors that districts do need to consider when developing walk-zone and they cover a variety of parameters.
- Nicholas asked if these factors were strict or whether they left room for situations such as requiring students to cross extremely busy roads to get to school.
- Susan said that one of the factors was that students were not allowed to cross more than 2 lanes.
- Brenda mentioned that some two lane roads are very busy

- Casey said that in his experience walk-zones are typically the product of staffing resources district capacity. He said that significant consideration is given to the neighborhood set up and less focus is given to proximity. From his perspective miles are arbitrary and what is feasible and acceptable is going to vary greatly from district to district.
- Kate reminded the group that typically if a family was denied transportation it was due to the fact that they lived within the walk-zone of the district.
- Kate reviewed the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) 'Safe Routes to School' program with the group. She mentioned that the CDOT reported that rural communities had been less likely in the past to take advantage of the program compared to more urban areas such as Denver and Boulder (slide 22).
- Michelle asked if the program was state funded.
- Susan said that she believed the program was state funded.
- Sarah asked if there had been any long term evaluations of the use of funds and how they had affected access for kids.
- Albert mentioned to the group that he had experience with the program in both Boulder and Denver. In one case the work was very school oriented and in the other it was driven more by the transportation department. In both cases he found the program impactful.
- Kevin mentioned that his district utilized the program to put in additional crosswalks, add slow zones by schools, and add bike lanes.
- Susan mentioned to the group that metro districts definitely use the program more than rural districts.
- Robert said that his district falls somewhere between urban and rural but his district had used the program to make improvements that he felt were beneficial.
- Sarah stated that she believes the reason rural districts are less likely to utilize the program is because they lack the capacity and resources to apply for any grant funding.
- Jessica agreed that this was a significant issue with regards to rural involvement.
- Kate reviewed the National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration (NHTSA) 'Planning Safe School Bus Stops and Routes Toolkit'. She mentioned that it has current best practices and functions to help schools build out safer and more accessible travel to school (slide 23).
- Michelle mentioned that she had mixed feelings about making recommendations in this area because she felt that having conversations with those groups would be important if recommendations were going to be made that would involve them.
- Kate emphasized to the group that they should focus on recommendations that help move the work forward and help meet the needs of the students. A perfect solution may not be immediately attainable but encouraging the use of existing resources could still have a positive impact.
- Michelle said that she envisioned making recommendations in concert with other groups because often things are done in silos.
- Susan said that the recommendation could be to encourage activities because that would help things be more proactive vs reactive.
- Brenda asked whether the group could consider making a recommendation to have a grant writer provided that could be shared among districts. She also mentioned that she would like to see the group set some policy standards with regards to walk-zones.
- Nicholas said that he liked the idea of getting into more specifics about walk-zone recommendations.
- Kevin mentioned to the group that things like walk-zones are incredibly localized for each situation and that what might work for one district wouldn't necessarily work for another. He also said that from his perspective walk-zones are predominantly in urban/suburban districts.
- Kate asked the group if it was correct to say that based on the conversation they felt that walk-zone development needed to be district specific, but should be grounded in best practices so encouraging districts to work with area experts both in and out of the state would be important.
- Michelle said that she felt that was correct. She thought that working with experts in the field to figure out the safest routes would be best.
- Nicholas said that we would also encourage districts to work with families and their community when developing walk-zones.
- Robert said that he doesn't like the work regulations because it can be too constricting for districts. He felt guidelines were better and perhaps they could focus on a list of components to focus on.
- Kate asked the group what components would be considered if they took that approach.

- Michelle said that the CDOT had all that laid out in the program and that an additional benefit was that it was readily available to families to review. She points out that if districts were encouraged to work with these organizations it would be very easy to raise awareness.
- Michael mentioned that he thought it was important to spread awareness about what was available so that districts could more easily access available funding sources.
- Kate reviewed with the group what had been discussed and proposed including encouraging districts to utilize available resources and work to spread awareness through a variety of communication methods.
- Jessica mentioned that she would also like to discuss the possibility of providing a grant writer to rural districts.
- Michelle asked if something like this already exists because she thought that it would be a conflict of interest to have the state provide a grant writer to funding that would be acquired from the state.
- Brenda said that she was originally thinking something more like technical support/assistance for grant writing because that was something that definitely already existed within the state.
- Stephanie mentioned that many grant programs do provide some assistance at least for a certain amount of time ahead of the due date.
- Kate reviewed with the group the components that had been discussed including encouraging the use of resources by districts, requiring CDE to promote the use of these resources, providing technical assistance to districts participating in grant programs, and requiring districts to incorporate communication methods that reference specific language regarding walk-zones.

#### **Agenda Item- Access to School Choice**

- Kate reviewed the Task Force's minimum requirements that were determined in April, reviewed current state mandates, and previously collected data from the family survey (slide 25-28).
- Kate referenced the Ed Choice article and the National Conference of State Legislators bill tracker tool that had been shared with the Task Force through the pre-read materials. She mentioned that this particular topic was extremely complex and would require numerous considerations with regards to developing a recommendation. She mentioned that states throughout the country dealt with this issue in very different ways.
- Kate asked the group if they felt that a decision could be made or whether they would need to suggest this work be carried forward by another group.
- Michelle said that nearly half of all states are now beginning to tackle the topic of school choice and that the bill tracker provided up to date information regarding bills from across the country.
- Susan stated that providing transportation to students to school of choice was an extremely complex issue that would require more staff and vehicles for all transportation departments if required. If those requirements were put in place she felt that schools would be significantly taxed so she didn't feel it was a feasible option.
- Michelle asked if as a parent she would be able to bring her child to a bus stop outside of her district so that her child could attend a school of choice.
- Albert said that it would depend on the district. He said that some will allow parents to file an exception form that could allow them to travel to and drop off their child at the closest bus stop within the district of choice. He felt that transportation outside of a given district would be extremely costly. Additionally, he felt that the length of time a child would need to be on a bus should also be considered. He doesn't feel it is in the best interest of the student if they are spending hours a day on a bus to go to another school.
- Sarah agreed that it was a complex issue and suggested the group make a value statement based on data collected from families.
- Kate mentioned to the group that if they decided to recommend that another group take on this topic beyond this Task Force, then having a value statement would help guide the work.
- Jen asked what the consensus on school choice had been at the previous meeting.
- Kate stated that the group had come to consensus that guidelines on walk-zones, access to school choice, and eligibility should be focus areas, however, no specifics on what those guidelines would be had been made. That was the focus of today's meeting.
- Nicholas stated that while he appreciated the fact that the charge was complex and the group had limited time, he felt that they had been charged with "watching out" for the working class and struggling families so it was important to decide on specific recommendations instead of recommending further work to address the issue.
- Brenda stated that the work should be student focused and student centered. She said a large number of students in the state don't attend their zoned schools so the group needed to make a

- specific recommendation to push the work forward.
- Kevin stated that he felt that the focus needed to first grapple with students that attended their neighborhood schools because due to transportation limitations there were students that weren't eligible for transportation because they were too close, not too far. He said that the issue needed to take priority.
- Michelle said that she felt the group needed to think outside the box and create an equitable transportation system.
- Sarah said that she felt they were not in a position to require anything from the districts but instead should focus on a value statement to ensure that work was moving towards ensuring kids have access to the school they want to attend.
- Jessica said that part of the Task Force's charge was to look at promising practices where they were already happening so they should investigate options in other states.
- Susan mentioned the E-Tag program which provided funding for families who were attending low performing schools to move to high performing schools. She said that if the group was going to consider recommendations that required transportation to school of choice it would need to be for select situations like that in which the student was not getting a good education. She said that school choice should not be an option for other reasons such as convenience for the parents. She felt that school choice needed a specific definition.
- Nicholas mentioned that he was part of the E-Tag program and many families were denied funding because the school they were currently attending was not considered "bad enough".
- Michelle asked about situations that don't have to do with the quality of education that the student was receiving but other issues such as bullying.
- Casey said that he felt that with the limited resources that were currently available for districts with regards to transportation, requiring them to transport kids to schools outside the district was not feasible. He said that perhaps third-party options could be considered but the district couldn't handle the additional burden.
- Morgan said that third-party support does currently exist but a complicated question was how would it be distributed through state providers.
- *During this discussion a conversation in the chat indicated that there was not consensus regarding what aspects should be included in a value statement. While some individuals wanted districts to work towards providing transportation to schools of choice, other individuals wanted the value statement to safeguard districts from needing to provide transportation to schools of choice.*
- Kate thanked the group for all of the good discussion but suggested that the group move on to the next topic to ensure there would be time to discuss all required topics before the end of the meeting.

#### **Agenda Item- Determining Eligibility**

- Kate reviewed the minimum requirements determined by the Task Force, reviewed the current state mandates, and reviewed data collected previously from families, drivers, and districts (slides 31-38).
- Kate noted that the data demonstrated that current routes were long and typically full. She also noted that many families surveyed indicated that they were not aware of their transportation options and communication from the district may be limited. Lastly, she noted that districts typically identified a lack of drivers at their biggest challenge to increasing the pool of eligible students for transportation services.
- Susan stated that when most districts talk about driver shortages they are not talking about one or two drivers, in many cases they mean dozens of drivers. She said that some districts can be 60 or more drivers short.
- Kate suggested that the group take a quick five minute break and then they could return to discuss eligibility further.

#### **FIVE MINUTE BREAK (12:06 PM)**

#### ***Discussion resumed at 12:11 PM***

- Kate reviewed additional district data regarding the use of routing and ridership tracking software. She highlighted the fact that a number of districts indicated that utilizing this type of software had solved a number of the district's transportation issues and in some cases the district had indicated that efficiency and capacity had been increased as a result (slides 41-45).
- Kate reviewed the fact that this type of software was more common in larger districts but some

- smaller more rural districts were also utilizing it.
- Susan asked if the purchase and upkeep of routing software could be claimed on the CDE-40 currently.
- Kate indicated that she was not sure but didn't believe that it was currently an option.
- Albert mentioned to the group that he has used routing software in multiple districts and it has always enabled the districts to find efficiencies and from his perspective has been hugely helpful. He stated that he doesn't think Denver could accommodate students in the way they are now if it wasn't for the software. He can make adjustments regularly and he also mentioned that he feels it makes the personnel in the district better at their jobs.
- Kate asked the group if they would be interested in recommending that the state support the acquisition of routing software for all districts and if so to what extent.
- Susan mentioned that the cost of software can vary greatly depending on what is needed at the district level.
- Stephanie asked how many districts currently have software because she felt that it could be beneficial on numerous fronts.
- Kate said that based on the data collected it appears that more districts didn't have software than did.
- Casey said that he believes the software is beneficial for everyone, even small districts.
- Kate asked the group if they would like to make recommendations for the state to explore a way to ensure a cost effective means for all school districts to access GPS and routing software potentially through a grant programs or reimbursement process.
- Nick asked if the state could help negotiate access to the software in bulk to help reduce the overall price.
- *During this discussion a conversation in the chat indicated that there was general interest in finding ways for the state to make the acquisition of routing and GPS software cheaper for districts across the state.*

#### **Agenda Item- Maximizing Utilization**

- Kate reviewed the data collected from families and districts regarding utilization of district funded transportation, including the use of opt-in processes across the state. Kate emphasized to the group that the data demonstrates that a certain portion of the population will always choose to transport their children and not use any transportation options. However, there is a subset of families that would utilize it but aren't now (slides 47-59).
- Susan commented to the group that transportation is a very fluid thing and routes are never the same even day to day.
- Albert mentioned that this is something that Denver grapples with regularly. He said that he often looks at historical data to help predict what utilization will look like moving forward and sometimes makes adjustments weekly.
- Michelle commented that there is no opt-in process in her district and wondered why some districts utilize this approach.
- Kate said that in theory, the opt-in process should help to ensure that routes are more efficient because they are only accounting for those families that want to take advantage of the district transportation. However, many districts indicated that the information collected isn't always accurate so oftentimes the opt-in process doesn't provide any real benefit to the district.
- Michelle mentioned that utilization is a real challenge for districts where kids need to pay to ride.
- Kate asked the group if they were interested in creating recommendations that would encourage districts to provide more information about transportation to raise awareness about what is available to them.
- Susan mentioned that communication can be difficult since phone numbers and email addresses can change. She also mentioned that many districts are encouraged NOT to publish bus routes in local newspapers to avoid access to the schedule to individuals outside the school system, particularly because oftentimes students are home alone when they are picked up for or dropped off from school. She felt it would be beneficial to encourage districts to utilize a variety of communication strategies to provide information to families.
- Robert mentioned that his district uses an App to track bus routes and inform parents about changes. He said that his district has had a lot of success with its use.

#### **Agenda Item- Finalize and Vote on Recommendation Components**

- Kate reviewed the recommendations as they had been prepared over the course of the meeting (slide 61).

- Kevin said that he would not vote for the vision statement for the school choice recommendation unless it included a component regarding the recommendations not impacting other students in the system.
- Sarah said she would not agree to that addition because he felt that providing school choice was an issue of equity.
- Brenda asked if the vote could be held until the next meeting since they were at time.
- Kate said that she could strike the access to school choice recommendation and the group could vote on all other components now.
- Stephanie asked if the group could come back to other potential elements of eligibility.
- Nicholas said that he felt they could vote on everything except the access to school choice now.
- Sarah said she was also fine with voting on everything now as long as the language wasn't final.
- Kate said that the final language for all recommendations should be voted on at the September 23 meeting so if a vote was taken now it would just be on the specific components of the recommendations.
- Susan encouraged the group to vote on the components (not the final language) of all of the recommendations with the exception of access to school choice.
- A vote was taken on all other recommendations and all passed with votes of 3, 4, and 5 (slide 62).

#### **Agenda Item- Next Steps**

- Kate reminded the group that the next meeting would be on Thursday September 5th at 10AM (slide 63).
- Kate indicated that the agenda and pre-reads for the meeting would be sent out ahead of the meeting.
- Kate thanked the Task Force members for attending today's meeting and for the great conversation that took place.
- The meeting closed 1:10pm