



School Transportation Task Force Meeting Minutes

May 13, 2024 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

[SB23-094](#)

Task Force Members Present: Chad Miller, Erin Camper, Leiton Powell, Casey Ungs, Dustin Kress, Morgan Judge, Brenda Dickhoner, Kevin Vick, Robert DiPietro, Micheal Madden, Stephanie Hansen, Jana Schleusner, Michelle Exstrom, Jen Douglas

Task Force Members Absent: Sarah Swanson, Steve McCracken, Dave Slothower, Nicholas Martinez, Amy Lloyd, Albert Samora, Joel Newton, Jessica Morrison, Kaycee Headrick, David Werner, Daine Shiele, Trevor Byrne

Facilitator, & Support: *Dillinger Research and Applied Data*- Kate McDonald, Sarah Sullivan, and Katherine Tartaglia *Colorado Department of Education*- Susan Miller, Rich Hull, Rebecca Sykes, Jennifer Oakes

Attendees: Fred Stewart (*Colorado Department of Education*), Donna Grattino (*Transportation Advisory Council*), Colorado School Finance Project, Allison Nicotera

Welcome and Agenda Review

- Meeting started at 10:00.
- Kate reviewed the agenda items (slide 3), guidelines for interactions, deliberation, and collaboration (slide 4), and design thinking (slide 5).

Agenda Item #1- Data Collection Updates

- Kate reviewed with the group current data collection and analysis.
 - More than 90 districts have completed the additional utilization survey that had been sent out following the last task force meeting.
 - Another reminder email will go out before the survey is closed and the data is analyzed.
 - Further analysis is also being conducted on driver and fleet information that was collected in the initial district survey.
- Kate reviewed the project plan as it stands right now and reviewed with the group the overarching charge of the task force as it is stated in the bill. (slides 7&8)
- Kate reviewed the Minimum Requirements Model Venn Diagram with the group. (slides 9&10)
 - The diagram organizes all the minimum requirements the group has come to consensus on over the past several months and shows how they are related to each other across the four core areas discussed to date.
- Kate reminded the group that over the coming months they would be making decisions regarding the content of final recommendations to be put forth in the final report.
 - In September the wording of all recommendations would be reviewed and finalized, today and over the coming months the group would only be voting on the specific components that would make up the recommendations.
 - As recommendations are developed it will be important for the group to think about the components in a holistic way and keep in mind that each recommendation does not need to be a stand alone recommendation but can be supported by other components. Single recommendations can touch on several areas.

Agenda Item #2- Transportation Innovation Grant

- Kate reviewed the Transportation Innovation Grant recommendation requirements spelled out in the bill. (slide 11)
- Kate reviewed the minimum requirements the group had come to consensus on during the January task force meeting. (slide 12)
 - Eligibility
 - Selection Process

- Grantee Requirements
 - Possible Solutions, Strategies, Services
- Kate opened discussion regarding the proposed changes to the eligibility requirements put forth in the original version of the bill. (slides 13 & 14)
 - Susan said that she felt the changes should address broadening communication around the bill itself to help ensure that all possible applicants were aware of the grant program. She felt that to effectively broaden the applicant pool there would need to be more time and effort spent on spreading awareness.
 - Brenda mentioned that the named organization types in the bill were quite inclusive but she felt that the focus of student type might be limiting. She mentioned that students in need would look different in different areas of the state so she suggested having the applicant identify and explain the need of the community and perhaps give “priority points” for student groups mentioned in the original version of the grant proposal.
 - Michelle said that she agreed and felt that the word “under-resourced” needed to be defined or have parameters because it could be interpreted differently by different people.
 - Stephanie mentioned that chronic absenteeism is a huge problem and in many cases the driving force and a lack of transportation. She also pointed out that highly mobile students and students in foster care could fall under the umbrella of under-resourced.
 - Jana agreed with Stephanie and felt that the innovation grant would be a great place to address issues such as chronic absenteeism.
 - Kevin suggested that the group use the term At-Risk as it had been defined by the School Finance Work Group. He felt consistency in wording would be beneficial and he mentioned that the At-Risk model continues to be a work in progress so the definition continues to expand.
 - Kate reviewed the components of the changes discussed including expanding communication about the grant to expand awareness, requiring applicants to identify and explain the need in the community, and providing potential priority points to applicants that were serving At-Risk student populations.
 - Stephanie asked about having a better understanding of what successful metrics would be for an applicant
 - Susan asked if that was getting too specific with regards to the recommendations.
 - Michelle mentioned that many other grant programs have funding that is limited to one fiscal year and wondered if that should be the approach of this grant program.
 - Casey asked that any data requirements be kept simple so that smaller districts like his can still apply for the program.
- Kate opened discussion regarding the proposed changes to the selection process requirements put forth in the original version of the bill. (slides 15 & 16)
 - Kate reminded the group that they wanted to review the requirement of sustainability and determine if that was necessary or if it would potentially stifle innovation.
 - Kevin felt that sustainability was necessary, however, he believed it was important in respect to ensuring the proposed innovation was good not just for the department of transportation but for the district as a whole. If the innovation only provided benefits at the detriment of other departments, then it would not be sustainable within the district.
 - Stephanie felt that good innovation would be sustainable and replicable, however, she suggested that the group simply eliminate the requirement that it be addressed in the proposal.
 - Dustin agreed and felt that the focus should be more about the applicant's vision of how the innovation would lead to “success” with respect to the issues identified.
 - Susan suggested that the application could ask the applicant to explain how the innovation could lead to “significant Impact”.
 - Kate reiterated that the group was moving towards removing the requirement for an explanation of sustainability and instead ask applicants to discuss the overall vision and how the applicant felt the innovation would provide a significant impact.
- Kate opened the discussion regarding the proposed changes to the grantee requirements put forth in the original version of the bill (slides 17 & 18)
 - Stephanie also suggested that when grant recipients are writing reports they should include both successes and challenges. She feels that grant reporting often only focuses on the “good” and she feels there is important information when challenges and failures

- are also discussed.
 - Kevin also suggested the other stakeholders provide feedback on the innovation during the process. He thought there would be value in hearing from the district itself.
 - Brenda liked that idea and suggested requiring feedback from the “district served” would be beneficial.
 - Kate reviewed the components of the changes discussed including discussing successes and challenges as well as getting feedback from outside stakeholders beyond the grant applicant.
- Kate opened the discussion regarding the proposed changes to the potential list of solutions, strategies, and services put forth in the original version of the bill (slides 19 & 20)
 - Jana commented to the group that she liked the list of proposed additions to the list.
 - Stephanie also felt that addressing the needs of highly mobile students and At-Risk students would be important.
 - Kate asked the group whether they felt that it would be important for applicants to speak to additional funding.
 - Brenda said that she felt it was important to not include that stipulation. She felt it would prohibit resource scarce areas of the state from applying.
 - Michelle also wants to add extracurricular activities to the list to differentiate from after school.
 - Kate reviewed the components of the changes discussed including the addition list items and removing the requirement for applicants to address additional funding outside of the grant.
- Kate reviewed all the components put forth for the final recommendations for the Innovation Grant Program ahead of a Task Force vote. (slides 21 & 22)
 - Eligibility
 - Broader applicant pool
 - Make sure there is component to communication piece for awareness to eligible applicants
 - Applicants need to identify and explain need in community with priority points for at-risk defined students
 - Does not prevent applicants that are not serving large populations of at-risk students from applying
 - Selection Process
 - Priority list for determining grantees would also include at-risk defined students
 - Address replicable, scaleable, and
 - Applicant would explain long term vision and impact, over sustainability and “significant impact” emphasis in requirement
 - Grantee Requirements
 - Ensure process is simplified and not cumbersome to enable especially small districts to apply
 - Metrics in applications and reports should provide information that enable evidence of impact but additionally feedback reporting and analysis from the stakeholders such as district served to show evidence of impact
 - Component around successes, failures, challenges, etc
 - Possible Solutions, Strategies, and Services
 - Possible solutions, strategies, and services could also include ways to help ensure continuous funding, addressing chronic absenteeism, addressing before/after school transportation, and addressing training of new and/or existing drivers
 - Address target populations- highly mobile students, at-risk students, low economic populations, extracurriculars, no conditional funding expectation
- No further comments were made by any Task Force members so a vote was taken. The components of the final recommendation for the Innovation Grant Program were passed with all votes being either 3s, 4s, and 5s

TEN MINUTE BREAK (11:15 AM)
Discussion resumed at 11:25 AM

Agenda Item #3- Transportation Collaboration

- Kate reviewed the Transportation Collaboration recommendation requirements spelled out in the bill. (slide 24)
- Kate reviewed the minimum requirements the group had come to consensus on during the January task force meeting regarding the use of public transportation. (slides 25 & 26)
- Kate reviewed with the group that there are many towns and cities in the state that currently have public transportation. Some provide free transportation to students while others have reduced fares. Transit routes often go past or have stops at or near schools within the area.
- Kate mentioned to the group that they would need to come up with some type of recommendation regarding the general or specific use of public transportation. Things to consider include, should any city with available transportation be encouraged or required to create a collaboration with the public transit, who would pay for this type of transportation, should existing programs be expanded? (slides 27 & 28)
- Kate asked if Leiton would provide the group with some information about the collaboration between his transportation organization and the district of Greely.
- Leiton discussed that his organization has a contract agreement with the school district in the area and they pay for student fares year round. Schools in his district were forced to increase walk zones due to driver shortages so they created these contracts. They also have agreements with universities in the area. They only have routes during the day and early evening, no late night runs. The organization looked into this possibility but it would not have been cost effective.
- Susan mentioned that if the Task Force makes a recommendation they would need to be careful about what it said since there are restrictions on what the transit companies are allowed to do since they are not state run and regulated.
- Michelle asked how many school districts currently take part in these types of partnerships.
- Kate said that they didn't have that information at this time.
- Susan mentioned that many large communities utilize public transportation and towns on the western slope and where RTD is available definitely take part.
- Michelle indicated that she felt this was a great opportunity but questioned if it was already happening where it could.
- Kate indicated that it might be but the Task Force could make a recommendation to solidify it as a model that is encouraged across the state.
- Casey suggested that perhaps the group could make a recommendation that if students are using public transportation to get to school the school and/or state should be required to reimburse.
- Susan mentioned that it would potentially be hard for schools to use public transportation as a form of routing students to school since routes can't be dictated for a specific purpose, however she did feel that it would be a good method for addressing transportation for after school activities.
- Casey suggested that perhaps it would be beneficial to track the use for a specific timeframe, such as a year, and figure out if the cost was worth the investment.
- Leiton said that in his district students could ride anywhere at any time (both during the school year and during the summer) so it would be hard to track where students were going and determine the cost benefit specifically around school use.
- Michelle asked if, given that set up, would requiring schools to reimburse students for public transportation be an excess burden on the districts.
- Leiton mentioned that before covid, students made up 60% of their ridership but then it fell. It is back up to about 40%.
- Susan asked Leiton is every vehicle was wheelchair accessible
- Leiton said that all their vehicles were equipped and that was a federal requirement.
- Michelle pointed out that it would be impossible to require transportation companies and school districts to create contract agreements but the group could strongly suggest.
- Kate asked the group what the recommendations should state as far as what would be available to students.
- Michelle suggested that the state could strongly encourage contracts that would provide no cost or low cost opportunities for students to utilize public transportation.
- Micheal asked if reimbursements for the district could cover anything beyond home to school and school to home transportation. He felt the state should cover the costs for the schools but he wasn't sure how that could be tracked. He reiterated Michelle's point regarding questioning whether it was an unnecessary expense for the district.

- Kevin asked if there was a way for regional transportation authorities to consider, when possible, adding stops at schools when planning their routes. He felt that the use of public transportation could be beneficial for things such as dual enrollment.
- Leiton asked for clarification on the reimbursement process
- Kate reviewed that currently only home to school and school to home was reimbursed for districts and in most cases it was only about 25% of the cost that was actually reimbursed.
- Susan mentioned to the group that even if districts were required to reimburse the cost on their own, in many cases this would still be a huge cost savings over the need to plan additional routes, especially for things like after school transportation that were not reimbursed now anyways.
- Michelle agreed and mentioned that she felt this was a win win. She did suggest that it may be helpful for some districts, cities, and towns to have example models (like Greely) to work from.
- Stephanie asked if there might be a way for focus groups to be formed so others could hear about some of the existing public transportation innovations that were happening across the state. She felt that strategy sessions, exemplar trainings, and examples of partnerships would be extremely helpful to help others develop ideas to invest in.
- Micheal asked if the group could suggest that the state cover the cost of public transportation in the reimbursement process.
- Michelle felt that the more the state could help with the better.
- Stephanie agreed and said that she felt beyond encouraging the use of public transportation, there should be conversations around encouraging revisions to public transit routes to include stops at schools whenever possible.
- Kate reviewed all the components put forth for the final recommendations for the Transportation Collaboration- Use of Public Transportation ahead of a Task Force vote. (slides 29 & 30)
 - The state strongly encourages collaborations with public transit entities to provide no cost or low cost (to student) opportunities for students to ride public transportation where available.
 - District would consider covering the cost and state should consider allowing costs to be covered in reimbursement process
 - Strategy sessions around state level exemplars about public transportation partnerships. State-level investment around this use. Potentially incentivize existing partnerships to share.
 - Support the encouragement of public transportation entities to include schools within their routes.
- No further comments were made by any Task Force members so a vote was taken. The components of the final recommendation for the Transportation Collaboration- Use of Public Transportation were passed with all votes being either 3s and 4s.
- Kate reviewed the minimum requirements the group had come to consensus on during the January task force meeting regarding the regionalization of transportation. (slides 31)
- Kate reviewed the four areas discussed as options previously. (slide 32-39)
 - Advanced technologies
 - Administration (sharing transportation directors etc) & Cooperative training
 - Regionalize special education, pathways, before/after school, & athletics
 - Sharing insurance, requirements, maintenance, transportation costs & purchasing
- Kate opened discussion regarding what the group felt would be the most beneficial area(s) to focus on in the recommendation.
- Susan mentioned that some administrative regionalization might work, such as payroll, however sharing a director would create significant challenges. She mentioned that when she worked in Michigan, a group of school districts she worked in hired a company to address all their special needs transportation and it was a huge lift of a financial burden for the districts.
- Kevin wondered if purchasing power could be created at the state level that would help smaller districts with things like fuel.
- Michelle mentioned that anything that could be done to regionalize transportation needs would likely be beneficial, especially in rural areas.
- Kate mentioned to the group that there were a lot of possible options for this recommendation, but the districts would know best what they would need and what would be the most beneficial. She suggested that the Task Force could recommend a group be formed of rural district representatives to ideate on the options and work out the details.

- Michelle said that creating a group like that would help to provide a space to share unique transportation challenges and help determine what should be regional responsibilities or district responsibilities.
- Casey mentioned that rural districts have many unique challenges. He said that there used to be local and regional groups to network and work together to solve problems and challenges. He thought that encouraging the creation of more of these groups would be helpful and allow for collaborative ideas to be created by the individuals that know them best.
- Susan said that there is a transportation group that does exist, however the group is struggling to find members.
- Kate reviewed all the components put forth for the final recommendations for the Transportation Collaboration- Regionalization ahead of a Task Force vote. (slides 40 & 41)
 - Recommend expanding or creating state level and/or regional level collaborations to further investigate options for regionalizations including but not limited to the areas identified by the transportation task force. Feasibility study to help develop a plan and implement a solution.
- Brenda requested that the recommendation keep the list of potential regionalization ideas broad enough as to not put constraints on the group.
- Kate added to the recommendation “make sure mentioned bullets are broad and not constraining”.
- No further comments were made by any Task Force members so a vote was taken. The components of the final recommendation for the Transportation Collaboration- Use of Public Transportation were passed with all votes being either 4s and 5s.

Agenda Item #4- Next Steps

- Kate reminded the group that the next meeting would be on June 11th at 10AM..
- Kate indicated that the agenda and pre-reads for the meeting would be sent out the week before the meeting and encouraged Task Force members.
- Kate reminded the group that if anyone materials or additional data that they wished to share with the group that they be forwarded to herself and/or Susan.
- Kate thanked the Task Force members for attending and closed the meeting at 1:00pm