

MDIRSS AOS # 91

Transportation Sub Committee Findings and Recommendations

June 2019

Transportation Sub Committee Participants:

Jim Sawyer - Southwest Harbor School Committee, Chair
Tammy Tripler - Swans Island School Committee, Chair
Dwayne Bolt - Bar Harbor School Committee
Teresa King-LeClair - Mount Desert School Committee
Tyson Starling - Community Member/Parent
Eric Hann - Mount Desert Island High School Staff, Custodian
Leon Sargent - Mount Desert Elementary Staff, Custodian/Bus Driver
Linda Campbell - Tremont Elementary Staff, Bus Driver
Lisa Park- Pemetic Elementary Staff, Bus Driver
Ian Braun - Mount Desert Island High School, Dean of Students
Mike Zboray - Trenton Elementary School, Principal
Marc Edward Gousse, Superintendent of Schools

Transportation Sub Committee Meetings:

- Thursday 18 October 5:00 pm - MDIRSS Superintendent's office
- Thursday 01 November 1:15 pm - *Bus Driver Meeting*, MDIRSS Supt's. office
- Thursday 15 November 5:00 pm - MDIRSS Superintendent's office
- Thursday 13 December 5:30 pm - MDIRSS Superintendent's office
- Thursday 24 January 5:00 pm - MDIRSS Superintendent's office
- Wednesday 29 May 5:00 pm - MDIRSS Superintendent's office

Background:

This document provides a global review of the MDIRSS AOS # 91 Transportation Operations. Transportation Service programs are designed to provide students with safe and reliable transportation to and from schools. At present, each MDIRSS AOS # 91 individual member school operates its own transportation program including bus purchases, repairs/maintenance and hiring drivers or by contracting these services (*Trenton and Bar Harbor*) through independent vendors.

Introduction - Statement of Purpose:

In 2017, MDIRSS AOS # 91 member communities were afforded the opportunity to meet and collectively discuss strengths, needs and challenges specific to our schools. The goal of these community forums was to gather feedback as to what is valued in our school system and how we can continue to provide high-quality, fiscally-responsible, public education while utilizing resources in the most efficient manner as practical.

Planning strategically is both important and necessary, as we recognize resources are not unlimited and should be maximized in support of doing what is best for all students. In reaching out to all stakeholders: parents, teachers, students, citizens, elected officials, business and community leaders, we seek to collaborate openly and realistically about the needs and priorities of our students, schools and communities.

The focus of this process was to listen and learn about perspectives and priorities and develop recommendations for consideration. As this work advanced, multiple scenarios were identified, to include: making no changes to how our communities support and deliver K-12 public education to a variety of potential partnerships or consolidation options. A portion of the result of this work is featured in this report, including options and recommendations for school board consideration as presented.

In support of this work, a steering committee began our path by conducting planning meetings and gathering data and information specific to our schools and programs. This information may be found on the MDIRSS website (mdirss.org) under the long-range planning tab.

As we consider feedback received to date, we wish to acknowledge consistent expectations and increased collaboration amongst our staff, students and schools will best provide the platform to consider thinking regionally about how and where our communities can best deliver high-quality, efficient and effective educational programming while maximizing resources through networking and shared services.

Through these community based conversations, programming to include: pre-K, gifted and talented, middle-level education, special education, co-curricular, maintenance, food service, operations, transportation, energy, capital improvements and others have been considered for best practice and efficiency. Of equal importance, as we seek to recruit, attract and retain exemplary teaching, support and administrative staff, we remain cognizant of providing competitive salaries balanced with the increased challenge of unsustainable health care and benefit premium costs.

Our students and schools consistently perform well above state and national averages on standardized tests. Throughout MDIRSS schools, art, music, drama and athletic programs are perennially successful on every level. In recent years, curriculum, assessment, professional development and policies have been realigned for continuity and consistency to ensure all students enter our high school universally prepared for success.

As we consider what is best for our students and schools, this is the optimal time to evaluate what is working well and, more importantly, what we can do better. On behalf of the Mount Desert Island Regional School System, we thank you for your continued support of our students and schools.

Transportation Sub Committee Matrix - Identified Advantages and Challenges:

	Pros/Advantages	Cons/Challenges
Staffing	- Outstanding staff - Informal networking and support	- Salary and benefits for drivers need to reflect area comparables - Salary and benefits for drivers is presently not conducive to attracting new staff - Sub compensation is not up to par cost-wise \$ and lack of subs - Sub support for staff (<i>spare drivers</i>) is lacking at selected schools - Concern voiced regarding amount of time some students may spend on buses
Professional Development	- Look at hosting regional trainings - Utilize “train the trainer” system to network PD (bus safety, etc.) - Budget funds to support PD for transportation employees on inservice days	- Develop a comprehensive professional development, training and safety program - Develop and implement regional training supports to sustain and advance essential practices and resources
Equipment	- Some schools have appropriate resources (<i>garages, storage</i>) - Safety is a focus - Support for materials and budget is adequate (<i>bus replacement, maintenance</i>)	- Transportation software implementation is <i>available at no charge</i> - to evaluate routing and potential options - Some schools do not have appropriate resources (<i>garages, storage</i>) - Need comprehensive planning metric for major equipment purchases(<i>buses</i>) and maintenance needs
Budgeting	Budget support adequate to fund/provide resources for transportation needs	- Not every school is familiar with their transportation budget (<i>reserve account, etc.</i>) - Need to budget for additional time i.e. professional development for drivers
Sustainability	- Consider alternative fuel sources (<i>propane, electric</i>) - Right thing to do (<i>environmentally</i>) - Network with Climate to Thrive for ideas (<i>districtwide</i>)	- Bus purchases are school specific and not coordinated systemically across our district - Evaluate routing and options to streamline runs/trips
Transportation /Operations (Coordinator, Facilitator, Support, Liaison, Advocate...)	- MDOE liaison - Equipment inventory, maintenance and procurement - Driver, administrative and student/parent support - Grant writing - Coordination of trainings, professional development, physicals, inspections and safety reviews	- Not a part of the school (<i>AOS position</i>) - Additional support costs money and requires buy-in from member schools/communities - Continuing to operate independently is inherently inefficient, strains limited resources and is impractical

	• Procurement - bulk purchase and resource coordination • Budget support - shared services • Job description development and review • Technical and training support • Ensure compliance with federal/state/local regulations • Recruitment and orientation of drivers • Networking (<i>formalized</i>) • Resource for staff/program (<i>human resources, trainings and budget</i>)	
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Management:

MDIRSS AOS # 91 member school transportation programs, including staffing, logistics and finances are presently structured as singular (*stand alone*) programs included within each local member school unit. This is not a typical format as most school districts either contract out all functions or deliver all transportation services and related functions through a single coordinated entity at the district level.

The present structure can lead to a blurred chain of authority, unintended inefficiencies, redundancies and ineffective communication. The present state of transportation service operations and logistics in our schools does not lend itself to efficient, or optimal use of resources in all instances. ***It is recommended the MDIRSS AOS # 91 School Boards consider employing an Operations Coordinator who could oversee and provide expertise in many logistical areas which are presently overseen by administration and existing support staff. In this instance, operations is defined as facilities, maintenance and transportation.***

This position (*Operations Coordinator*) could coordinate and facilitate:

- Transportation routing and software coordination
- Preparation and coordination of daily safety and required bus inspections
- Budgets and reconciliation of operations (*transportation/maintenance services*) and finances
- Supply and consumable purchasing and reconciliation for MDIRSS AOS # 91 member schools including: fuel, licensing/inspections, maintenance and cleaning supplies
- Equipment procurement, inventory and repair/replacement
- Recruitment and training of spares, subs, new drivers and custodians
- Parent, student and staff resource
- Promote and monitor bus safety practices
- Oversee district wide efficiencies specific to operations (*transportation, maintenance and operations*)
- Coordinate professional development and related trainings for all operational support staff
- Monitor compliance for safe work practices and procedures
- Schedule, hold and facilitate MDIRSS AOS #91 quarterly safety meetings
- Serve as MDIRSS operations point of contact and liaison to the Maine Department of Education
- Serve as a resource and primary liaison for MDIRSS member school building principals and staff
- Other related duties as assigned

Presently, there are trainings offered by the State and informal voluntary supports to ensure safe and secure operations. At present, there is no consistent standard, oversight or review to monitor and ensure compliance of safety standards specific to operations universally across MDIRSS AOS # 91 member schools. This identified challenge is of concern with respect to potential exposure for safety and risk for liability.

Overall, individual school transportation programs from a management perspective appear to be running well. However, this independence lends itself to unintended redundancies and inefficiencies. The transportation support staff in each school are exceptional and hard working individuals who operate independent programs to the very best of their abilities. Staffing is a challenge with few resources to support illness, personal appointments, trainings and/or other related absences. It is recommended the district review the current structure of all operational services and infrastructure and consider supports and resources which will strategically enhance the efforts of all operational support staff consistently throughout all MDIRSS AOS # 91 member schools.

Commendations:

- Dedicated, talented, hard working and professional transportation staff
- Clean and well maintained buses and storage space
- Focus on providing resources to meet the needs of our students, staff and schools
- Bus inspections for MDIRSS AOS # 91 Member School Transportation Services programs presently meet acceptable standards as evidenced by State Police annual reviews

Findings and Recommendations:

- Develop an inventory data base and uniform financial benchmarks, beyond school based budgets, to measure program success
- Review current feedback systems and develop an established framework for identified commendations and recommendations for improved practice
- Research and evaluate proven practices and other school districts that currently run consolidated programs to identify additional program ideas and supports
- Complete a detailed review of present “in-house” programs to identify additional informal effective practice(s) and efficiencies
- Establish a district wide Operations Coordinator to support all MDIRSS AOS # 91 member schools in navigating logistical, facility and infrastructure needs
- Convene an ad hoc sub committee comprised of students, staff and community members to provide input into the transportation program and identify ways to promote additional supports and efficiencies
- Research and explore after district school activity runs to further enhance opportunities for all students
- Formalize inter agency cooperation between schools (i.e. buses, subs, spare drivers, consolidated bus runs)

Reference: [MDIRSS - AOS #91 Transportation Data 06/05/19](#)

[Title 20-A: EDUCATION, Part 3: ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
EDUCATION, Chapter 215: TRANSPORTATION](#)