

October 22, 2007

Harvard Public Schools

Special Education Out of District Transportation Report and Recommendations

To: Special Education Task Force
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The following report is prepared with the benefit of having met, on two separate occasions, representatives from the Concord Acton Special Education collaborative (C.A.S.E), including executive directors and transport manager.

Overview

Harvard Public Schools (HPS) is required to provide transportation services for all children attending out of district educational facilities as identified in and supported by an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Additionally, where specified in the IEP, school districts provide transportation services appropriate to the disability of each child such as wheel chair equipped vans and specialized care and accompaniment. In Harvard's situation, all transportation expenditures are incorporated into the overall Special Education budget and more specifically are recorded in the Town of Harvard, Budget Report – "line #03005 53214 Sped Transport 1464". Summary expenditures for 2004 > 2007 inclusive are attached as Schedule A.

Transport Options

Harvard currently offers two modes of transport for our out of district students;

- a) **Mileage Reimbursement** – this is offered to parents and families choosing to "self-transport" children to their respective learning establishments. The reimbursement rate is based upon regulatory guidelines of the Dept of Education, Special Ed, and requires approval at the Special Education Administrative director level. On a per mile/student basis, it is likely the most cost effective single mode of transportation.
- b) **C.A.S.E Collaborative** – As a member of C.A.S.E Harvard avails itself of the transportation services provided to member districts (Note – there are twelve member districts, including Harvard, of which ten districts utilize the transport services. The remaining two districts provide their own transport). In discussions with representatives of CASE, it is appropriate to state that they were all extremely helpful, open and candid in their comments. Facts, figures and modus operandi thus gleaned are summarized below in bullet point format.
 - ◆ Member school districts are represented on the CASE Board of Directors typically by the district superintendent. School district business managers are also separately represented at various levels of discussion regarding CASE matters.

- ◆ An annual budget, including a separate budget for transport, is prepared, presented and approved by the Board of Directors. Current year budgets are formulated based upon t prior years student count.
- ◆ CASE’s core transport operating principles are founded around the values of student safety, quality of service, compliance and efficiency. Central to these operating principles CASE, through pooled resources, is able to offer services to its members on an as needed/on demand basis e.g. morning and mid day pick up/drop off as well as variable early release schedules.
- ◆ State regulatory standards limit each child’s one way time on a van to no more than one hour or less if so stipulated in the IEP.
- ◆ CASE currently provides transport service to 464 children from the ten participating districts, of which 19 children are from HPS.
- ◆ During any given year the total number of students transported By CASE has historically fluctuated.

| | CASE Transportation | | Enrollment History | |
|-----------|------------------------|------|-----------------------|---------|
| | BEGINNING | | END | %CHANGE |
| SEPT (98) | 183 | June | 241 | 31.7% |
| SEPT (99) | 200 | June | 242 | 21.0% |
| SEPT (00) | 239 | June | 270 | 13.0% |
| SEPT (01) | 269 | June | 329 | 22.3% |
| SEPT (02) | 304 | June | 354 | 16.4% |
| SEPT (03) | 338 | June | 400 | 18.3% |
| SEPT (04) | 349 | June | 474 | 35.8% |
| SEPT (05) | 444 | June | 511 | 15.1% |
| SEPT (06) | 439 | June | 501 | 14.1% |
| SEPT (07) | 464 | | | |

- ◆ The 464 children attend 122 different programs requiring 100 different drop off points and a total of 86 different routes.
- ◆ From last year’s data, CASE purchased a total of 170,000 gallons of regular gasoline. This equates to a total of approximately 2,400,000 miles driven annually.
- ◆ Fuel is purchased on an annual fixed price contract (current basis = \$1.92 per gal) and typically represents a .30 cents per gal discount to retail pump prices. Also, CASE does not pay the State or Federal gasoline excise tax approx .40 cents per gal.
- ◆ 90 vans are currently owned and operated by CASE, 14 of which are wheel chair capable.
- ◆ Vehicle servicing and maintenance is outsourced to one of several facilities depending on location and requirements.
- ◆ Vans typically are replaced on a 5-year cycle via a competitive bid process.
- ◆ 89 drivers are employed working approximately 30 hours per week each. Drivers are all required to undergo a CORI check and to hold a class 7D license, renewable annually.

Costs are allocated back to each district utilizing a formula weighted by and factoring in such things as the number of children transported, the number of pickup drop off points as well as the location of programs based upon a zone system.

- ◆ . Harvard's current assessment equates to approximately 7.7% of the overall CASE transportation budget.
- ◆ The CASE budget is revenue neutral.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The CASE transport model is a large-scale operation and is regarded as the type of model around which other communities could pool resources to garner efficiencies (Ref; State grant of \$300,000 currently in trial). It is currently operating at our close to capacity.

Though not part of this study or report, the costs of establishing and running a Harvard independent transportation model would likely be prohibitive. Similarly, the potential for disruptive risks associated with considering any move to a third party provider (as was partially the case in 2004 –see schedule A), would need to be very carefully assessed against the quest for deeper efficiencies – see Assabet Valley article, Worcester T&G Oct 11th, 2007. In the further interest of transparency, however, the district may wish to entertain a competitive bid/RFP option.

Under any circumstance, it is the recommendation of this report that the district asserts a leadership role internally and within CASE based around the following observations and suggestions:

1. The costs (11% of total Special Ed budget) associated with transporting our children can act as an added impetus to continually strengthening in-district services in order to provide for more children. Similarly, given the apparent unilateral increase in Special needs across the Commonwealth, our district could explore the possibility of partnering with a neighboring district (Littleton?) to provide more services closer to home where Harvard alone cannot justify resources.
2. The very scale and complexity of the CASE model suggest efficiencies could be extracted by deploying sophisticated route management technology capable of processing the many variables. The superintendent, as Harvard's Board of Director member, should be encouraged to pursue identification and/or development of such software.