

Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives



SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION REPORT 2014-2015

8/31/2015

Pupil Transportation Consulting, Inc.

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Dear Colleagues:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC) this report is being submitted to summarize the activities of the Massachusetts Special Education Transportation project funded by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

The website, www.SpEdTransSavings.org, is designed to provide valuable information to school districts and program administrators in creating greater cost efficiencies while maintaining and supporting the highest quality of services in the area of special needs transportation.

The October DESE SIMS data and actual ridership for targeted programs is made available on-line, this will provide school districts and program personnel with another tool to use as they strive to maintain high quality cost-effective transportation for all special education students in the Commonwealth.

Ridership data was provided by private day and collaborative programs and reflects actual ridership from the fall of 2014, this provides an opportunity for school districts to review the data to see what opportunities exist to share routes, see actual routes they shared with other districts, examine existing trends and plan for future transportation services.

Vendor data was collected that can be used to assist districts when setting up transportation services. This is especially helpful if their student moved to another community and needs transportation.

We believe that this project continues to demonstrate opportunities for multi-district routing and provides districts with information that will help them to make sound fiscal decisions and maximize cost benefits.

Respectfully,

Colleen Cavanaugh

Pupil Transportation Consulting, Inc.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION TASKFORCE 2014-2015

Background

Transporting our special needs students continues to be a challenge facing school districts across the Commonwealth, and in many cases the cost of transportation exceeds the tuition. The total expended by public schools in FY2014 for out-of-district special education transportation services was \$ 98,811,240, transporting 8,377 students, as reported on the DESE End of the Year Report, Schedule 7. As part of the State's on-going efforts to create efficiencies in the area of Special Education Transportation and reduce costs, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has continued to support the State Special Education Task Force on various initiatives. An on-line resource, *SpEdTransSavings.org*, provides actual ridership data for identified special education programs and the total enrollment as shown on the October 1 DESE SIMS report. This data allows school districts and program administrators to explore the potential cost benefit of multi-district routing. The actual ridership data collected at the school site is a valuable resource for school districts as they strive to maintain and reduce costs in the area of special education transportation.

The State first funded this initiative in FY2011; data was collected from targeted private day and collaborative programs on the actual ridership by vehicle at the school site. The project met with great success and clearly demonstrated the potential for generating cost savings and providing a valuable resource for districts. This past year efforts were focused on developing and enhancing the website, creating an on-line data application, conducting outreach and providing district support when requested.

According to October 1 DESE SIMS data, 9,918, attended 354 special education out of district programs in FY2015. Note this is total enrollment, not all students receive transportation services. Special education administrators have stated they do not necessarily know if students from neighboring communities are attending the same out of district placement as students from their town.

Districts have indicated that it is sometimes difficult to find transportation vendors to transport students, especially for those students that have moved to another community.

Purpose

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) continued funding in FY2015 to support the initiative. The on-line data tool that was developed last year to assist program administrators in recording their ridership data, was used to collect ridership from the targeted programs. This on-line application has eased the data collection process while ensuring a timelier collection of the information.

Process

Districts can utilize the district data tab on the website to look at programs they send students to or they can view the Oct 1 DESE Sims data which provides statewide enrollment. This information can be exported into an Excel spreadsheet and sorted to show districts other communities within close proximity that may be sending students to that same program. Districts should then reach out to that district to explore a ride share potential. Districts can also see their ridership information and check their billing to make sure they are receiving a cost benefit on a shared ride.

In many cases school districts own and operate their own vehicles, by sharing the cost of that route with another district, they can reduce their operating budget.

Savings can be realized by sharing a route, an example would be, if the cost of the vehicle is \$215 per day, a district transporting one student alone would pay \$38,700 dollars based on 180 days, if they were to share the vehicle with another district who sends a student to the same school their cost could be reduced in half resulting in a savings of \$19,350 dollars. Even greater savings can be realized when additional students from other districts are added to the route.

Reports were prepared for each of the 26 Collaboratives statewide utilizing the October 1 DESE SIMS data to identify programs member districts send students to. This information is most valuable in assessing and planning coordinated transportation services for member districts of the collaborative.

School districts were surveyed through the Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials, to record the vendors they use for special education transportation services and vendor data was obtained through the ridership module.

Outcomes

The target programs were selected based on those programs receiving students from ten or more school districts. Ridership data was collected from 53% of the 92 identified private day programs, this is up from last year where a 46% response was realized, and 48% of the 54 identified collaborative programs responded which is down from last year which had a 74% response rate. The October 1, DESE SIMS data for FY2015 was imported into the database.

Vendor information was collected and a table was developed on the website to allow districts to view all vendors within a five-mile radius of the community they are interested in. In addition to sharing special education providers, the table indicated regular education vendors and those conducting services for out of district vocational programs and those serving McKinney Vento students.

Select A District:

Select A Town:

Dist	District	Vendor	Reg Day	In Dist SPED	Out of Dist SPED	Out of Dist Voc	Home less
0.00	ARLINGTON	AR-BEL Trans		Y			Y
0.00	ARLINGTON	Arlington PS					Y
0.00	ARLINGTON	Belmont Cab					
0.00	ARLINGTON	Clinton Livery					
0.00	ARLINGTON	First Call			Y		Y
0.00	ARLINGTON	J.S.C. Trans		Y	Y	Y	Y
0.00	ARLINGTON	MCJ Transportation		Y	Y		Y
0.00	ARLINGTON	Parent					
0.00	ARLINGTON	TLC					
1.75	BELMONT	AR-BEL Trans					
1.75	BELMONT	Belmont Cab					
1.75	BELMONT	Boston PS					
1.75	BELMONT	Dee Bus					
1.75	BELMONT	First Call					
1.75	BELMONT	J.S.C. Trans					
1.75	BELMONT	TLC					
1.75	BELMONT	WCT					
1.75	BELMONT	YCN		Y	Y		Y
2.80	WALTHAM	AR-BEL Trans		Y			Y
2.80	WALTHAM	Belmont Cab					
2.80	WALTHAM	First Call			Y		Y
2.80	WALTHAM	J.S.C. Trans		Y	Y	Y	Y
2.80	WALTHAM	Parent					
2.80	WALTHAM	TLC			Y		
2.80	WALTHAM	WCT					

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Other initiatives conducted this past year include several roundtable presentations across the state to educate administrators on the benefits of utilizing the website data provided to create savings in special education transportation. The Taskforce recommended that an opportunity exists to create direct savings to a school district by conducting individual special education reviews. This would include:

- Review all contracts and processes used for obtaining transportation services
- Role of district personnel in arranging services
- Explore option of district operated program
- Conduct analysis of transportation budget and actual route costs
- Review IEP process as it pertains to transportation
- Review school committee policies as they relate to transportation services
- Utilize www.spedtransavings website data to explore potential route share opportunities
- Interview:
 - Special Education office personnel
 - Transportation vendors
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The FY2014 data was analyzed to identify high cost districts with a goal of conducting special education transportation reviews.

A team was put together to conduct a review for this year, the projected savings from that review was estimated at approximately \$50,000 initially.

Conclusion

The actual ridership data collected at the school site is a valuable resource for school districts as they strive to maintain costs in the area of special education transportation. It allows a district to determine if a ride share exists and they can reference their cost to see if they are receiving a discounted rate, and explore additional opportunities to cost share with other communities. The October 1 DESE SIMS Data provides districts with information for all special education programs in the state and can also assist with the transportation planning process.

The DESE has continued funding in FY2016 to sustain and support this initiative relative to the providing the October 1 DESE SIMS data and to conduct special education transportation reviews for districts with a 50% contribution from the participating district. The Taskforce agreed that the ridership data, although valuable, will not be collected due to the low participation rates from the identified programs. Some of the goals identified for the upcoming year include:

- Continuation of services provided now
 - Website
 - District Support
 - Presentations to State Associations
 - Maintain Vendor Database
- Input DESE Data for Second half of year
- Bolster On-line Forum for Questions and Support
- Expand vendor data base capabilities
- On-site District transportation reviews
- Work with school districts interested in consolidating transportation services

The website provides school districts and program personnel with another tool to use as they strive to maintain high quality cost-effective transportation for all special education students in the Commonwealth.