

Ministry of Education

Ministère de l'Éducation

Capital and Business Support
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Date: August 5, 2021

Memorandum to: Directors of Education
Senior Business Officials

From: Didem Proulx
Assistant Deputy Minister
Capital and Business Support Division

Subject: **Update on the Student Transportation Review**

I am writing to provide an update on the Student Transportation Review.

In early 2020, the Ministry of Education announced a review of student transportation with a goal to achieve a more effective, accountable and needs-based student transportation system in Ontario. As part of the review, a Student Transportation Advisory Group (STAG) was established with representatives from school boards, transportation consortia, and school bus operators to discuss transportation funding, consortia model and operations, and transportation contracts.

This advisory group has had the opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on a variety of topics, including these themes: standardization of service levels, cost drivers, accountability, consortia model and driver supply. As part of these discussions, an external consultant was retained to undertake an independent analysis on cost drivers of operating school buses and to conduct a jurisdictional scan of procurement and contracting practices in student transportation.

The ministry appreciates the involvement and input of STAG to date in providing feedback on matters related to student transportation, which supported next steps on the Student Transportation Review detailed below.

Student Transportation Review – Next Steps

Building on the work with STAG and the external independent analysis, the ministry is exploring a potential funding option centred on a needs-based funding approach which can incorporate a benchmark framework and a volume-based approach built on province-wide common reference standard to improve consistency in funding across the province, as well as a review of contracting practices.

To continue with the Student Transportation Review and support the development of a new funding approach for student transportation, the ministry will engage the sector in consultations focused on the following three topics:

- A Technical Committee on Reference Standards is being established to support the development of province-wide common reference standards (such as walk distance) for funding purposes, reflecting the recommendations made by the Auditor General in 2015, that could be applied to estimate need;
- Establishment of a funding benchmark, reflecting the work of the external consultant and STAG, with factors that vary across the province such distance travelled that could be applied in a funding model; and
- Enhance accountability and transparency in contract management, which may include a survey on current procurement and contract practices, such as the status of adoption of the Campbell Report recommendations.

The ministry recognizes that flexibility is needed in student transportation to account for local needs and decisions. It is anticipated that any proposed funding approach may include provisions for safety training and local priorities.

Next Steps

The ministry will begin these targeted consultations over the coming weeks and will continue to work with the larger student transportation sector to support the planning for 2022-23 school year.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Mehul Mehta, Director (Acting), School Board Business Support Branch at 647-448-3862 or mehul.mehta@ontario.ca.

Your continued support and participation in the student transportation review is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Didem Proulx
Assistant Deputy Minister
Capital and Business Support Division

c: Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario
Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques
Council of Ontario Directors of Education
Council of Senior Business Officials
Student Transportation Consortia Managers
School Bus Ontario