

2021-22 School Year

HLWW Transportation Discussion

For the 2020-21 school year, schools were forced to explore ways to reduce capacities on their school busses and vans, due to COVID-19.

The first guidance to come out was that students would need to be 6 feet apart on busses and vans, creating an almost impossible situation where a maximum of 15-16 students could be on a school bus and 1-2 on a school van.

About two weeks after this guidance came out, modifications were made to allow for 50% occupancy on busses based on the total capacity (72 passenger bus could have 36 students on it), basically meaning 1 student per seat (maybe 2 if they were in the same family).

HLWW made the decision at that time, to adjust start and end times for school to accommodate a DOUBLE ROUTE SYSTEM, in order to reduce capacity. While many parents were transporting their children to school, there was no guarantee on how many would do that or for how long they would continue to do that, if the restrictions on capacity either loosened or tightened.

Once the double route system was implemented, there was really no way to return to a single route system (which could have been done in February when the Governor of MN announced that all schools should work to move back to "in-person" – bus capacities were expanded but quarantine #'s were increased in the event of a positive case), without substantial changes and disruption.

At that time, routes were in place for approximately 6 months, parents and students had become adjusted to schedules, and any change would have created confusion and adjustments for everyone. It also seemed like the safest thing to do was to continue with the double routes, in the event COVID case numbers increased and guidance changed again.

In reviewing the application of a double route system this school year, there are a number of things to consider as to whether we should continue it into the future. The following is a summary of these considerations:

Benefits to a Double Route System

- 1) If COVID-19 changes and future guidance requires the limiting of capacity on busses, vans, and in school, the DOUBLE ROUTE SYSTEM would be an effective mitigation strategy. The double routes are essentially created, and would only require a few tweaks to them at the start of next school year to adjust for new enrollments and graduates.
- 2) Drivers have reported a major reduction in discipline issues and distractions. Principals have noted the same in regards to bus discipline issues.
- 3) Older students WOULD BE on a different bus than younger students, and older student CAN model bad behavior for younger students.
- 4) Bus routes were shorter due to less pick-ups/drops and modifications by the bus company and drivers to be more efficient with timing. A full bus needs to run the full route, which is longer and takes more time (ride time).
- 5) Older students, in particular to high school students who have jobs and activities, are able to sleep in. Many districts have gone to a double route system out of necessity because of the size of their enrollment (Monticello, Buffalo, Elk River, Big Lake), and as part of this, some have the older students start later... but not all.

Drawbacks to a Double Route System

- 1) Cost – 4.0 has offered to continue the double route system at a cost of \$35,000 to \$36,000 per year. This does not include fuel. We can assume based on our numbers from 2020-21, that we will put on 54,000 additional miles due to double routing. Here is an estimate of fuel costs:

54,000 miles / 8 miles a gallon = 6,750 gallons x \$3.15 = \$21,262.50

Total Estimated Cost - **\$57,262.50** (Comparison – it costs us \$44,000 per year to add another route and driver)

- 2) Parent schedules are disrupted. While older students can stay home by themselves and get on the bus, families with children in multiple buildings (Elem vs MS/HS) would not be together.
- 3) Older students end school after 3:00 p.m. – this disrupts start times for students in activities and forces us to release students for activities more often than we would like – thus they miss class.
- 4) Older students are not on the same bus as younger students. Prior to 2020-21, Pre-K through Grade 12, were all on the same bus. We lose the ability to have older students model GOOD behavior for younger students.
- 5) Coordination with 6 school building stops is an issue – while it was mostly resolved in 2020-21, it still means much doubling back for our private school students accessing our transportation system.
- 6) HS/MS day becomes just as short as the elementary day – while they are both nearly equal, it goes against what our intent was with the original plan for 2020-21 listed below.

What were we going to do in 2020-21 before COVID-19?

In 2020-21, HLWW Schools had adjusted the start and end times to be the following:

- HS/MS Start – 7:55 a.m.; Elementary Start – 8:10 a.m.

- Elementary End – 2:45 p.m.; HS/MS End – 3:00 p.m.

We did this for a variety of valid reasons:

- More elementary staff could now coach

- HS/MS day was lengthened; Elementary day was shortened (we were way out of whack when it came to the number of required hours for older students as opposed to younger students) – this fixed that.

- Not an issue any longer with the implementation of E Learning Days – but in the case of make up snow days or closures – the calculation was now equal for number of days each age level was over the minimum requirements and if snow days needed to be made up, we could do so universally rather than potentially making up a day for older students, but not younger students. More of logistics thing if it was to happen.

- Class periods at the HS/MS could be longer, thus giving the teachers more time to work with students on content or if they were struggling (7 period day schedules do not have the flexibility that elementary schedules do, where students spend the majority of their day with their homeroom teacher).

RECOMMENDATION for 2021-22: