

Bus Drivers

1. Did we lose bus drivers primarily because of COVID? Pre-COVID what was the bus driver situation?

ESD was short bus drivers before COVID, and for the past four years, ESD has been fully staffed for only about 2.5 months during this four-year time period. Between June and October of 2020, ESD lost 13 bus drivers of ESD's original total of 39. Reasons for leaving ESD included retirement, family/life issues, relocations, health issues, etc.

2. Were our previous bus drivers offered their jobs back? Because we started hybrid in Oct. did that help us retain bus drivers?

ESD did not let go or furlough any bus drivers. Yes, ESD was able to keep drivers engaged in transporting more students. Before the October hybrid model started, bus drivers were transporting smaller groups of students in the special education programming and delivering meals and school materials.

3. Do bus drivers get insurance?

Yes. Bus drivers receive the same type of benefits as other PSE employees, as negotiated by the PSE union.

4. Can we offer incentive pay?

Yes. We have recently added the benefit of applicants being paid for their time to train for their CDL license.

5. What steps have we taken to find bus drivers and when did that process start?

ESD has posted and advertised open bus driving positions continuously for the past three years. This process has included using newspaper, television, radio, rodeo parade, social media advertisements, and physical signage, and there are ongoing efforts. We recently put advertisements in the Daily Record, Facebook and on the front page of the ESD website to emphasize this need. Currently, ESD has not received any applications for bus driver positions.

6. What steps can we take to retain bus drivers?

Bus drivers are currently attracted to ESD because of the longer hours that are possible with systems like the tiered system. Their average work day is about two or more hours per day more with the tiered system compared to a transfer system (based on a five day a week schedule). This has helped to retain our bus drivers for this year.

Routes

1. How are the ESD routes determined? What steps have been taken to evaluate our routes and when did that process start? Key findings?

Routes are determined using student data, physical address, roadway circuitry, distance traveled, passenger ride time, seating capacity, and school pickup/drop off locations. Transportation staff partnered with our bus routing software company and spent three months last summer developing the tiered system and its hybrid offshoots. Education Logistics, ESD's software company, continued to review all potential transportation options for the 2021-2022 school year, throughout the first semester. Since January, the transportation team has collectively invested over 200 hours reviewing the tiered system and the feasibility of the transfer model.

2. What is our bus ridership in numbers?

To date, we are transporting 28% of our normal ridership. This should improve when K-5 goes back to M-F school day. Prior to COVID, ESD had approximately 1,700 students riding the bus daily. During this year, ESD has had approximately 500 students riding the bus daily.

3. Do we legally have to provide transportation to all students?

McKinney-Vento (homeless children and youth) students and students with special needs who have transportation marked on their Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are the only students mandated by law to be transported to school.

4. How is transportation funded? For instance, does that department get a set amount of money, and if we save money can we use it elsewhere?

Transportation funding is primarily based on student ridership and the efficiency rating issued by OSPI. Transportation funds (9900) may only be spent on to-and-from school busing.

Start Times

1. Do our buses need to run early because of breakfast?

Yes. ESD sets up drop off times 15 to 20 minutes early before school starts, so that students have time to eat breakfast.

2. What were our previous start times and this year's start times?

Previous times were approximately 0750-0830 for all students K-12. Currently, K-5 is 0730-0755, MMS is 0915, EHS is 0920.

3. Because of the change in start times did it add responsibilities or additional time to our staff?

No, except for adding extra hours for our bus drivers.

4. Did we have zero hour for secondary this year?

Yes, at EHS on hybrid days.

5. Have we provided transportation for zero hour?

ESD does not provide transportation for zero hour.

6. Is there research that supports either elementary or secondary start times?

There is research that suggests that later start times could be beneficial for adolescents and their circadian cycles. Other studies state that K-5 students may struggle to focus and have more disciplinary issues with an earlier start.

7. Has the district heard the concern from staff about child care and has the district taken any steps to reach out to our local childcare providers?

The Superintendent has initiated discussions with local daycare providers to make them aware of a potential need to expand their before and after school services for next year.

8. Has the EEA sent a survey to its members about start times and shared it with district staff?

Our understanding is that EEA did send a survey to its members about start times and shared general feedback with District Staff.

7. Does the district plan to get feedback from parents - how and when? English as a second language families?

The ESD Board and Superintendent have received much feedback from parents through email. This FAQ sheet will be distributed to families and posted on the ESD website with translations of this information available in Spanish.

If ESD does not gain the necessary number of bus driver applicants (5-8) to consider a transfer system for the 2021-2022 school year by April 29th, ESD will need to adopt a tiered busing system. If ESD does gain 5-8 applicants for bus drivers by April 29th, then ESD will need to ensure that these applicants are well on their way to being qualified drivers by the end of May. Also, in order to support decisions that need to be made by high school students (Running Start as an example), ESD will need to have the tiered model B as a back-up plan (with secondary students going first), just in case the applicants are not able to qualify for their CDL license.

As described above, if ESD does not gain the number of bus driver applicants (5-8) by April 29th, a decision will be made on April 29th regarding which tiered model will be implemented. Because ESD has about 600 to 900 students who participate in competitive sports, having secondary schools with a later start time would cause these students to lose important instructional time at the end of the day when they are required to leave school for games. If ESD has to implement a tiered system, the preferred model would be for secondary students to start first.

8. What type of transportation model will be used when Ida Nason Aronica Elementary Opens as its own entity in September of 2022?

ESD will need to consider a different type of transportation model when this fourth elementary school opens. A transfer system of busing will not be economically feasible when Ida Nason Aronica Elementary opens. We will be creating a Board Committee made up of parents, staff and students in the fall of 2021 regarding changes that will be necessary to provide for optimal transportation of students for the 2022-2023 school year.

9. What is a two tiered transportation schedule, and what are the advantages?

A two-tier schedule is established with school start times staggered at two different times. This schedule helps with staffing shortages, district growth, traffic congestion and coordinating instructional days within the different buildings. Staggered bell times allow ESD to utilize drivers and equipment more efficiently.

10. What is the process for considering the impact on staff?

ESD will continue to make changes as smooth as possible. We are currently meeting with different stakeholders. In addition, ESD staff are dedicated professionals who are committed to doing what is best for students, and together we will continue to collaborate to negotiate the impact of these changes on working conditions.

11. Why can't the district use part time staff in a chaperone role on bus routes to provide bus drivers with a K-12 and disciplinary issues.

Last spring, ESD was in the process of working with CWU administrators to potentially utilize students to “volunteer” on school buses to help us with student conduct. These hours on the school bus would have sufficed the students’ community service hours required for graduation. ESD will continue to work with CWU at the university should we choose to pursue this strategy in the future, as more students return to an “all back” model.

In order to use current part time employees, we would need to make adjustments to job descriptions/work hours’ /wage level and find funding to execute this plan.

12. Has the district investigated private bus contracts under a competitive bid process?

Yes, this was investigated several years ago and deemed fiscally unfeasible for the district to pursue.

13. If routes are currently 35 minutes, can we consolidate routes and increase times to 45 minutes to reduce the numbers of drivers we need.

ESD bus routes average 45 min - 1hr in actual driving time from the first student picked up to the arrival at the final destination for student drop off. This year, ESD began with 18 bus routes and consolidated down to the 16 we currently utilize.

14. Have the other WA state districts with bus driver shortages gone to a tiered system?

Multiple school districts in WA utilize tiered bus routing.

