Rosemount • Apple Valley • Eagan Public Schools

Educating, developing, and inspiring our students for lifelong success.

Meeting Date: **03/09/2026** Place on Agenda: **Consent** Action Requested: **Approval**

Topic: **Minutes of the March 3, 2026, Special School Board Meeting**

Presenter(s): **Kristen Powell** Title(s): **Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and School Board**

Chairperson Cory Johnson called the special School Board meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. on March 3, 2026, at Dakota Ridge School.

Present: Robin Cerio (clerk), Catherine Diamond, Leah Gardner (treasurer), Cory Johnson (chairperson), Jackie Magnuson, Sakawdin Mohamed (vice chairperson), Anna Williams, and Superintendent Michael Bolsoni.

Motion by Magnuson, seconded by Cerio, and carried, with five members voting in favor and no members voting in opposition, to approve the agenda.

Diamond and Mohamed arrived at 5:32 p.m.

Student Transportation: Stabilization, Solutions, and Long-Term Stability
Superintendent Michael Bolsoni, Director of Finance and Operations Christopher Onyango-Robshaw, General Counsel Adam Wattenbarger, and Director of Special Education Janet Fimmen provided an update on ongoing transportation challenges and efforts to restore reliable, predictable service.

District leaders acknowledged the disruption families and schools have experienced this year due to daily route cancellations and delays. Since early December, approximately 5 percent of routes - about 11 per day - have been canceled or delayed.

The administration explained that the challenges stem from increased transportation demand and a shortage of available drivers. Contributing factors include a national school bus driver shortage, increased employee absences following implementation of Minnesota's Paid Leave Law, growth in early childhood and special education services, magnet and nonpublic transportation obligations, the opening of the district's 20th elementary school, and recent boundary changes.

Leaders outlined immediate actions already underway to stabilize operations, including approval of a new labor contract increasing driver wages, intensified recruitment and training efforts, addition of substitute and standby drivers, creation of an additional router/trainer position, expanded partnerships with local transportation companies, and efforts to improve route efficiency by asking families to voluntarily release unused bus seats. Administration reported that these steps have begun to improve route coverage in recent weeks.

In addition to recruitment efforts, the district is strengthening support for transportation staff by improving coordination between schools and transportation, adding bus chaperones where needed, clarifying student behavior expectations, and strengthening internal communication and supervision.

The Board also reviewed potential policy revisions to improve long-term sustainability and reduce system complexity. Proposed changes to Policy 707, Student Transportation, include moving to an opt-in transportation model and limiting transportation to two addresses per student. Additional areas under review include

intradistrict transfers, walking distance eligibility, fee-for-service options, and service models for early childhood, specialized programs, and magnet schools.

District leaders emphasized that no final long-term decisions have been made. No action was requested on this report item.

Adjournment
Motion by Cerio, seconded by Williams, and carried, with seven members voting in favor and no members voting in opposition, to adjourn at 6:32 p.m.

Cory Johnson, School Board Chairperson

Robin Cerio, School Board Clerk

DISTRICT196
One District. Infinite Possibilities.

SCHOOL BOARD
NOTICE OF MEETING

Topic

Student Transportation:
Stabilization, Solutions, and Long-Term Stability

5:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 3, 2026

Dakota Ridge School
4629 144th St. W
Apple Valley, MN 55124

Please call 651-423-7723 if you have questions.

Educating, developing, and inspiring our students for lifelong success.

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

Special School Board - 5:30 p.m. at Dakota Ridge School

A. **Call to Order**

1. Approval of Agenda

B. Reports

1. Student Transportation: Stabilization, Solutions, and Long-Term Stability
   - *presented by Michael Bolsoni, superintendent, Christopher Onyango-Robshaw, director of finance and operations, Adam Wattenbarger, general counsel, and Janet Fimmen, director of special education*

C. Adjournment

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Public Schools

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Meeting Date: **03/03/2026** Place on Agenda: **Reports** Action Requested: **None**

Topic: **Student Transportation: Stabilization, Solutions, and Long-Term Stability**

Presenter(s):	Title(s):
Michael Bolsoni	**Superintendent**
Christopher Onyango-Robshaw	**Director of Finance and Operations**
Dan Kretsinger	**Coordinator of Transportation**
Eric Hansen	**Director of Secondary Education**
Jeremy Sorenson	**Director of Elementary Education**
Adam Wattenbarger	**General Counsel**
Janet Fimmen	**Director of Special Education**

Background
This school year, staffing shortages and operational challenges have resulted in daily bus route cancellations since September. These disruptions have affected students, families, and school schedules.

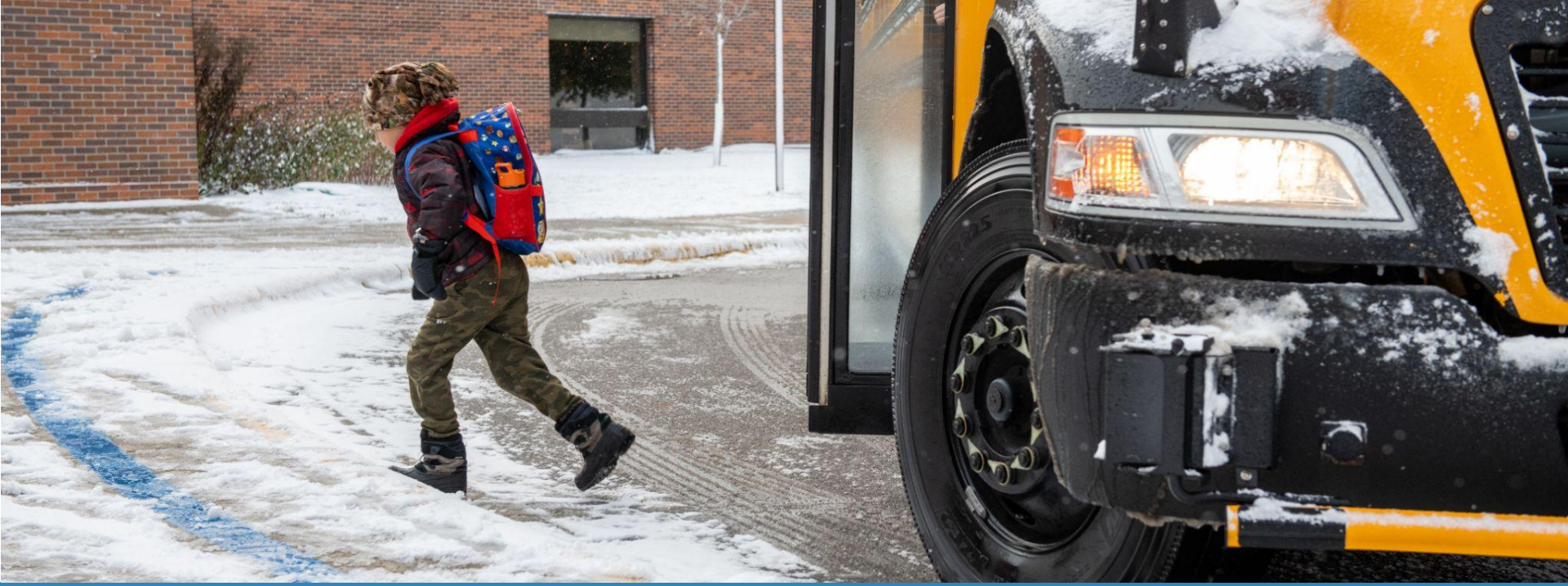
With a focus on hiring and training, district leaders are urgently working to stabilize transportation services. It is a complex system. District 196 provides more personalized transportation services than the law requires. While this reflects our longstanding commitment to supporting families, it also places significant strain on the system. The size of our district, the variety of road conditions, and the length of some routes further complicate the challenge, particularly when staffing levels are insufficient to reliably cover all routes.

In District 196, we do not have enough drivers to cover all scheduled routes. Improving transportation services is a top priority for district leadership. We must reduce services in a careful, legal way. Our goal is a system that is fair, sustainable, and reliable for the future.

District leadership monitors daily route completion, staffing levels, and on-time performance and continues to take steps to improve reliability.

The purpose of this report is to provide the School Board with an update on transportation performance, staffing efforts, corrective actions, and next steps to increase route coverage and service consistency.

Recommendation
This is a report item only. No action is requested.



Student Transportation

Stabilization, Solutions, and Long-Term Stability

PURPOSE AND FRAMING

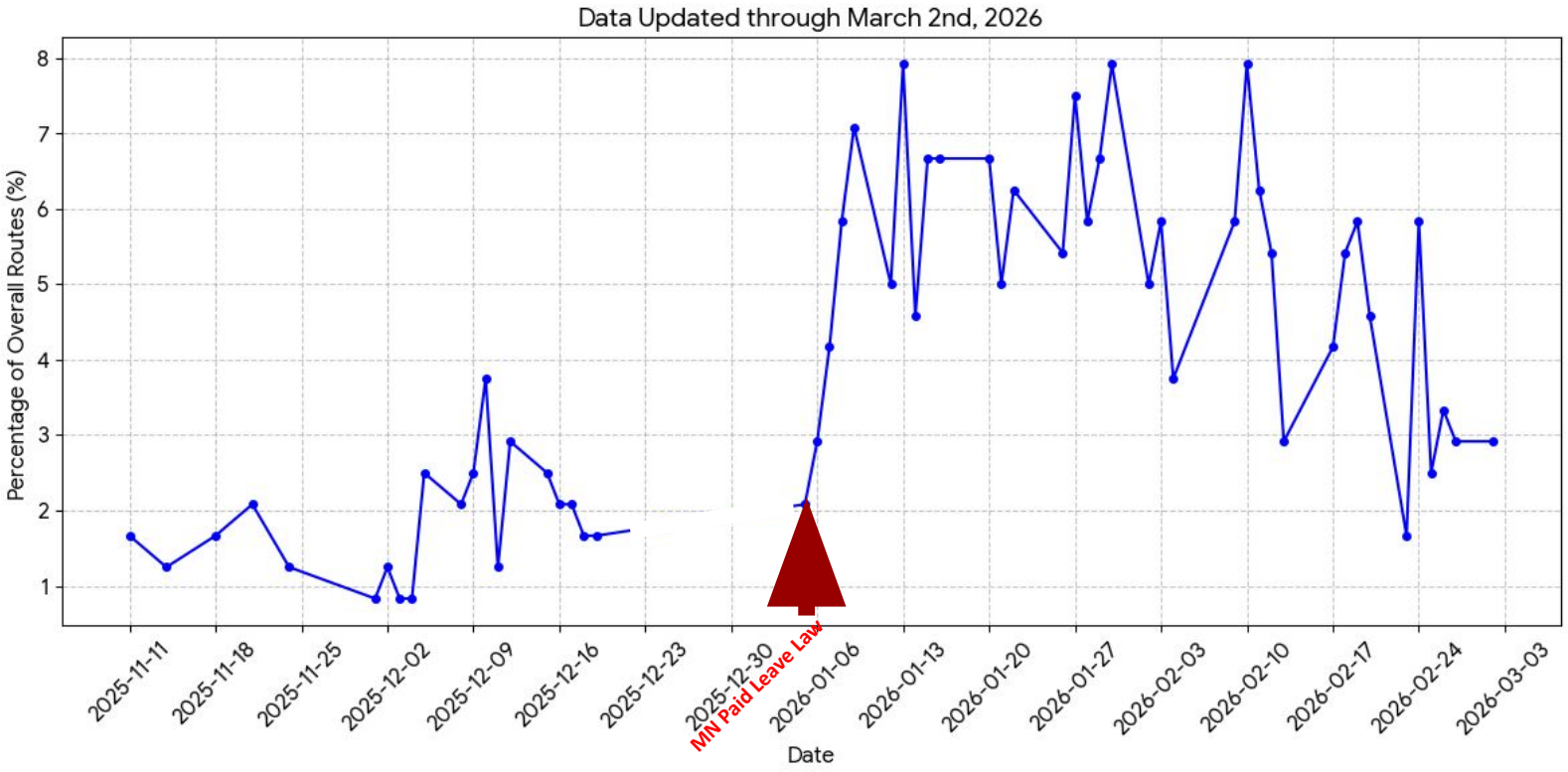
Understanding the challenge and path forward



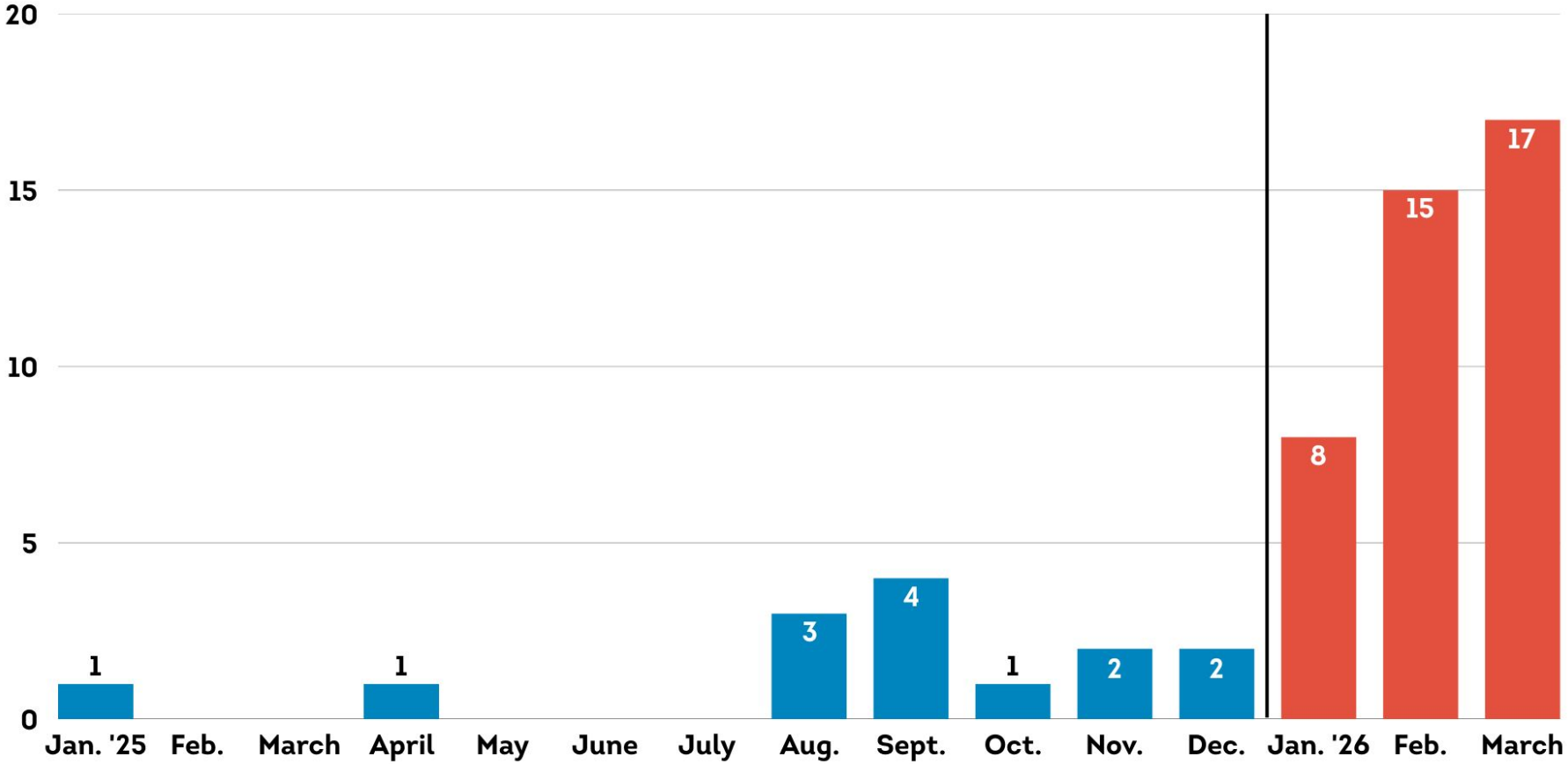
- Current reality
- Immediate actions
- Future actions being considered

UNDERSTAFFED, OVER COMMITTED

Percentage of routes canceled Nov. 2025 - Feb. 2026



LEAVE OF ABSENCE SUMMARY



INCREASED DEMANDS

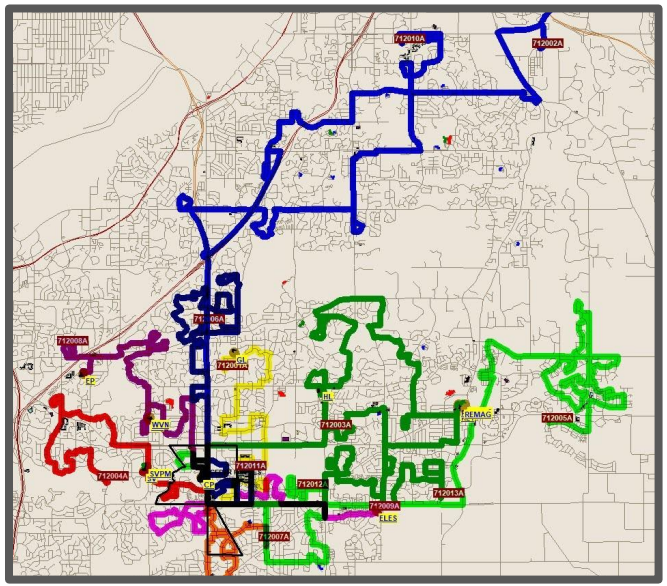
How we got here



- 20th elementary school
- Elementary boundary changes
- Growth in center-based and early childhood special education enrollment

COMPLEXITY IN OUR SYSTEM

How we got here

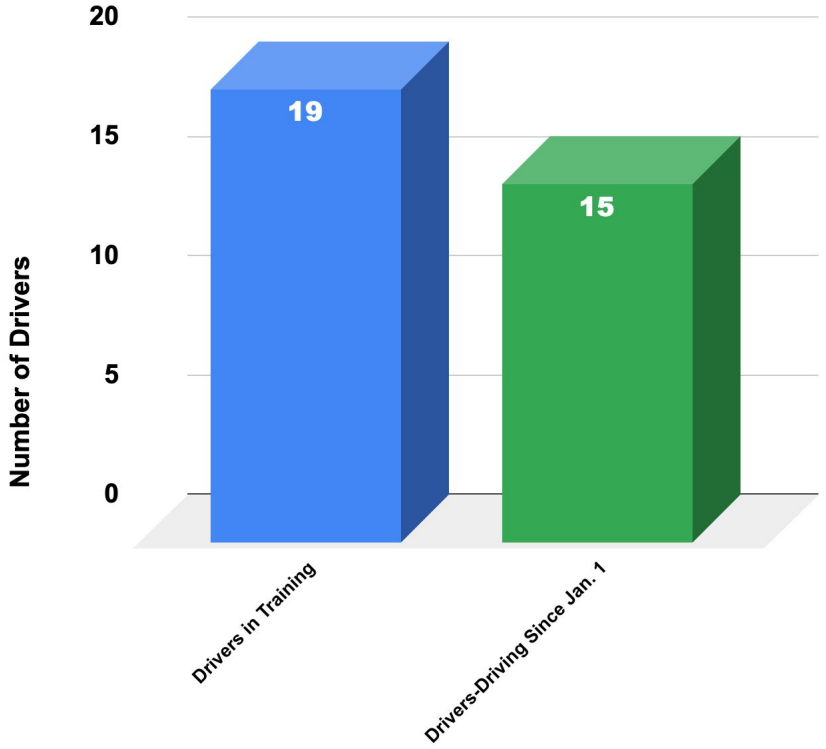


Cedar Park Elementary School Routes

- State law requires districts to transport public, private and charter schools
- Service beyond state requirements
  a. 196 has 1.0 mile walk zone for elementary
  b. 196 has 1.5 mile walk zone for secondary
  c. State requires 2.0 miles for transportation
- Magnet and specialized programs
- Multiple pick-up and drop-off locations

INCREASE STAFFING

What we are doing now



- Expanded, targeted driver recruitment
- Multiple candidates in the pipeline
- Adding stand-by drivers to reduce cancellations during absences
- Hiring new router/trainer

SUPPLEMENTAL TRANSPORTATION



- Contracting with three bus companies (up to 10 routes)
- Expanded partnership with TCT (Type III van service)

SEAT EFFICIENCY

What we are doing now



- Voluntary *Release Your Seats* if families can transport (980 seats)
- Remove bus assignment for high school students with active parking passes (winter: 1,800 passes)
- Looking for targeted route consolidations this spring.

TEAM CULTURE AND STUDENT SUPPORTS

What we are doing now



- Strengthening partnerships
- Adding chaperones and reinforcing clear behavior expectations with schools and families
- Strengthening alignment between Transportation department and school leaders

POLICY WORK

What we are doing now



Changes to Policy 707:

1. Transportation upon request (“opt-in”)
2. Limit to two addresses per child

Future considerations:

1. Intradistrict transfers
2. Walking distance modifications
3. Fee-for-service changes

CONSIDERATIONS

Potential changes for next fall



- Early Childhood
- Specialized programs
- Magnet school transportation
- Fee-for-service options
- Walking distances

EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL ED

Potential changes for next fall



Current challenges

- Long transportation routes for our youngest learners.
- Reduced available space for center-based K–5 students

Possibility of a northern location

- Shorten transportation routes
- Reduce travel time for students
- Reduce complexity of routing for center-based special education
- More students assigned to home schools.

CENTER-BASED PROGRAMS

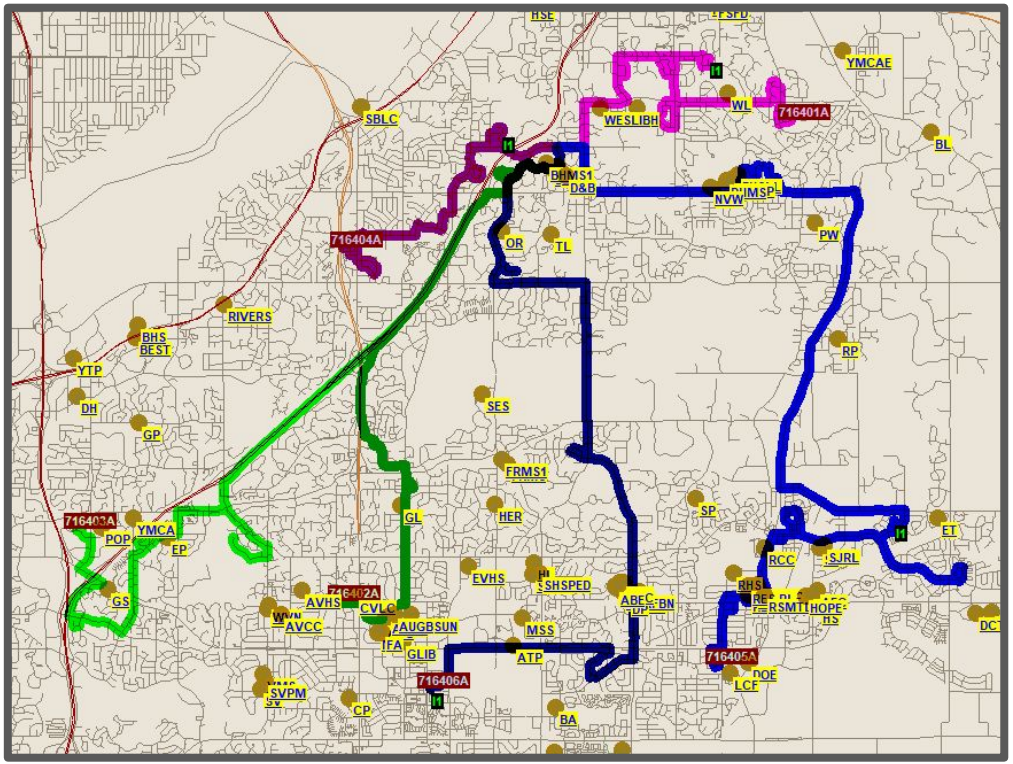
Potential changes for next fall



Elementary Students in Center-based	In attendance area school	Assigned out of attendance area
616	195	421
	35%	65%

CENTER-BASED PROGRAMS

Potential changes for next fall



MAGNET SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Year	Total buses	Total magnet students (not in attendance area)	Magnet students per bus
18-19	54	1,156	21.4
19-20	56	1,112	19.9
20-21	55	1,088	19.9
21-22	56	1,239	22.1
22-23	58	1,058	18.2
23-24	63	1,107	17.6
24-25	71	1,212	17.1

MAGNET SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

2024 - 25 School Year	Students (not in attendance area)	Number of magnet bus routes
Cedar Park Elementary	261	14
***Diamond Path Elementary**	221	13
Echo Park Elementary	44	9
Glacier Hills Elementary	327	17
Oak Ridge Elementary	105	8
Valley Middle School/ Apple Valley High School	129	10

OUR COMMITMENT

Restoring reliable transportation



- Rebuilding staffing capacity
- Reduce disruptions for students, families, and schools
- Invest in solutions that strengthen long-term stability
- Communicate clearly, consistently, and transparently


QUESTIONS?


THANK
YOU!