

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Mark K. McQuillan, Commissioner of Education

DATE: January 5, 2011

SUBJECT: Regional Transportation System

Executive Summary

Introduction

In an effort to increase the efficiency of the Greater Hartford region choice transportation system and encourage participation of Hartford and suburban students in Sheff programming throughout the region the State Department of Education (SDE), through the Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) has been working with the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) and Hartford Public Schools (HPS) to develop a regional transportation system. The SDE has proposed legislation this year that would consolidate transportation across all Sheff choice programming under one umbrella and provide one level of reimbursement for all students regardless of which program they participate in. The Department is also in the midst of updating and extending its transportation administration contract with CREC along with participating in the bidding process for new 5 year bus contracts. The current bus contracts expire in June 2011.

History /Background

On July 9, 1996 the Connecticut State Supreme Court held that the public school students in the City of Hartford attended schools that were racially, ethnically, and economically isolated in violation of the Connecticut Constitution, and urged the State to take prompt steps to seek to remedy the violation. The state uses a variety of programs to provide reduced racial isolation educational environments to Hartford students including, interdistrict magnet schools, the Open Choice program, charter schools, the CT Technical High Schools, and regional Agricultural Science and Technology programs.

The Phase II Stipulation and Order, entered into in spring 2008, requires the State to provide transportation to Hartford and suburban students participating in these programs through the RSCO. It directs the state to review and improve transportation services for interdistrict programs including improving service, shortening ride times, and linking geographical areas to increase transportation efficiency and encourage the participation of Hartford and suburban students in Sheff programming throughout the region.

To accomplish these goals and ensure the compliance of the various choice programs the SDE contracted with CREC in May 2008 to develop in concert with the RSCO a regional transportation system. A national transportation expert, TRANSPAR, was contracted with to help RSCO and CREC determine the viability of developing such a system and provide guidelines for its development, including a recommended administrative structure, a financing structure, and a means of creating efficiencies within the system that enhance and maintain the viability of the system. Over the last two years these recommendations have begun to be implemented with some success. It is critical that this process not be disrupted.

Recommendation and Justification

This year CREC is transporting on the state's behalf over 7,000 students on approximately 400 buses. These students are transported daily to 166 schools in 43 districts, which cover 1,119 square miles. If the programs continue to develop as expected they will be transporting close to 10,000 students next year. The size and significant utilization of the system make it imperative that we provide sufficient human and financial resources for the system and continue to develop and refine the system to create the maximum level of efficiency. Extension of our contract with CREC through the coming bus bidding cycle will allow us to continue to do this with a partner that is also a participating school operator and therefore is as invested in the success of the system as the department is.

With its existing transportation office CREC has the resources and expertise to contract for and manage the bus contracts on our behalf. As the volume of ridership continues to grow at such a fast pace it is the department's responsibility to ensure stability within the system, both administratively and financially. As mentioned previously this has led to the development of proposed legislation around the financial structure necessary for long-term success.

Policy Implications

The greatest implication of not creating a successful regional system of transportation will be our inability to meet the court ordered compliance measures in the stipulated agreement. Not only will we be out of compliance but we will also be left operating a highly expensive, inefficient transportation system that does not aid us in meeting our obligations. It is critical in this time of limited resources that we create a stable administrative and financial structure that enables us to meet the requirements of the court in a responsible manner.

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