

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Darryl L. Williams, Ed.D. ♦ Superintendent ♦ 6901 North Charles Street ♦ Towson, MD ♦ 21204

VIA ELECTRONIC E-MAIL ONLY

June 3, 2022

The Honorable Julian E. Jones, Jr.
Chairman, Baltimore County Council
400 Washington Avenue
Towson, MD 21204

Dear Councilman Jones:

Thank you for your partnership and commitment to Baltimore County Public Schools. As you know, a national bus driver and attendant shortage has created transportation challenges for school systems across the United States. BCPS is no exception. While many systems canceled routes to address the crisis, BCPS committed to maintaining service for more than 77,000 students. This commitment, coupled with the impact of COVID-19, has led to service delays for some families. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate our commitment to safe, reliable transportation and summarize steps taken this year to recruit and retain drivers and attendants and improve service.

Service Delivery

Throughout this school year, dedicated bus drivers and bus attendants have covered multiple routes; doubling and tripling back to transport students. Unfortunately, because of multiple route coverage, some students have arrived late to school or home. We have deployed all available transportation support staff and supervisors to cover routes, however, due to ongoing issues with staff leave related to COVID-19 and call-outs, delays persist. On average, transportation staff must cover 20 percent of our routes daily. This fall, we implemented enhanced communication procedures directly to schools to provide families with estimated arrival times. We know this situation is not ideal, however, it is our current operational paradigm given statewide and national shortages. Operational adjustments for next year are intended to improve efficiencies including timely arrival of transportation service, real-time communication with stakeholders, and consistent responses to bus behavioral infractions.

Recruiting and Retaining Staff

The added workload has taken a significant toll on our transportation team. It is critical that BCPS recruit and retain drivers and attendants. We have implemented several strategies to attract new staff and incentivize existing staff. To date, we have held 25 transportation-targeted recruitment events, in addition to our overall recruitment efforts. This spring, we invited contractors to bid on additional school bus routes to support existing service needs. This effort resulted in coverage of

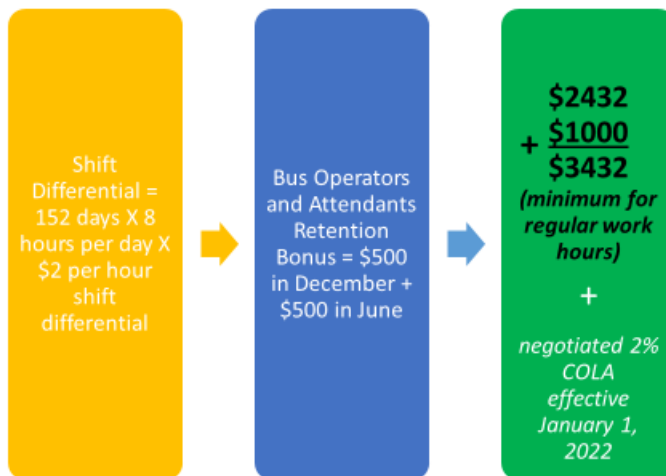
additional routes. We have also made organizational changes to address the shortages including the dedication of two human resources staffers focused on operations and the reclassification of routing assistants to enhance competitiveness.

Additionally, in partnership with County Government, we addressed pre-employment barriers and announced the following:

- Shift-differential pay of \$2 per hour for all hours worked, including overtime.
- No-cost fingerprinting, physical exams, drug testing, and sleep apnea testing.
- A \$250 sign-on bonus for new bus transportation employees.
- A \$250 employee referral incentive for current employees.
- A \$50 monthly attendance reward for on-time attendance every day for bus drivers and attendants.
- A \$1,000 transportation retention bonus for drivers and attendants. All members of Team BCPS received a \$1,000 retention bonus in January 2022. Bus drivers and attendants received \$2,000 this year.

A summary infographic shared with transportation staff in November 2021 is below. Additional financial incentives, including a \$750 summer stipend for drivers and attendants and an enhanced compensation package for the upcoming year, aim to ensure BCPS is competitive.

Additional Compensation For ALL Team BCPS Bus Operators and Attendants



While this salary adjustment is for the remainder of the year, please note that AFSCME and BCPS are working together in the negotiations process to identify a long-term salary readjustment. Thank you for all of your work in supporting students every day!

Shift Differential: ALL bus operators and attendants will receive an additional \$2.00 per hour (including overtime hours) for the remainder of the year- Week of November 8 – Week of June 13 for all hours worked

Retention Bonus: \$1000 to be paid in two equal \$500 payments in December and June (this is in addition to \$1000 retention bonus for all Team BCPS in January 2022 – total \$2,000 retention bonus)

Perfect Attendance: Staff will be rewarded monthly for reporting to work on-time every day for each assigned shift unless required to miss work for bereavement of an immediate family member, BCPS Office of Health Services mandated quarantine, religious holiday, jury duty, or military duty.

Additional Incentives

- Employee Referral
- Leave Conversion (Utilize Urgent Personal Business days Winter & Spring break)

Improving Service

The proposed school bus and safety initiative recommended to the Board of Education by County Government and Baltimore County Public Schools Office of Transportation was not approved in the summer of 2020 and November 2021. Features of this comprehensive initiative included exterior and interior cameras, global positioning routing software integration, mobile and web-based information portal/application, pre and post trip electronic inspections, and mobile terminal devices to address transportation concerns that existed prior to the pandemic. Following that decision, the Office of Transportation has worked with partners across the state of Maryland and reached out to large districts outside of Maryland to collaborate and problem solve related issues. In February, we hired an expert transportation consultant from Howard County to provide additional support to the team.

To date, we have focused on the following improvements to address transportation needs:

- Updating discipline reporting and infraction/consequence guidance by level to ensure timely reporting of infractions and improved consistency in discipline response.
- Upgrading *Routefinder* routing software to improve route efficiency and effectiveness.
- Piloting a mobile and web-based application this spring for 11 routes. This application may be an option for communication to our schools and family stakeholders moving forward, as well as for us to review planned versus actual bus routing.
- Implementing 2-way radios for safe communication on buses between drivers/attendants and the Office of Transportation.
- Piloting Multifunction School Activity Bus (MFSAB) in four high schools to provide safe transportation options for student activities.

Next Steps

The team conducted an in-depth analysis of our service model and in May presented a series of proposed service adjustments for September 2022. Next steps include obtaining feedback and important considerations for implementation. We are committed to improving service to families with enhanced transportation safety and communication. To that end, we have held several conversations with stakeholder groups including:

- Office of Transportation representatives
- Board of Education members
- Union Presidents – AFSCME, TABCO, ESPBC, CASE, and OPE
- Association of Elementary School and Secondary School Administrators leadership (AESA and SSAA)
- Elected officials

Additional meetings are scheduled with:

- Student Council/Junior Council Student Leadership – June 6, 2022
- Principals – June 7, 2022

The Honorable Julian E. Jones, Jr.

June 3, 2022

Page 4

- PTSA Leadership – June 7, 2022
- Reopening Stakeholder Workgroup – June 8, 2022

Once again, we appreciate your commitment to the students, staff, and families of Baltimore County Public Schools. In addition to the recruitment and retention of staff, we expect proposed operational adjustments to improve on-time arrival, communication, and safety. We look forward to our continued collaboration in addressing the transportation needs of our system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darryl L. Williams", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Darryl L. Williams, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Copy to: Myriam Yarbrough, Ed.D, Deputy Superintendent
Mildred Charley-Greene, Chief of Staff
Duane Baysmore, Director of Governmental Relations and Constituent Services
Thomas Bostwick, Legislative Counsel/Secretary, Baltimore County Government