



Date: December 20, 2023 **Agenda Item:** 8.3

To: Board of Trustees

From: Shawna Warren, Superintendent

Originator(s): Sean Nicholson, Associate Superintendent, Corporate Services
Amy Kolesar, Manager, Transportation Services

Governance Policy: [Policy 500: Student Transportation Services](#)

Assurance Domain: Governance

Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS)
SLQS Competencies ([SLQS](#) / [Board Policy 700](#)):
School Division Operations and Resources
Supporting Effective Governance

Subject: **Transportation Services Department Report**

Purpose:

For information.

Background:

Sturgeon Public Schools provides safe, dependable and efficient transportation for students. The Division operates 73 school buses and transports over 3,000 students to and from school each day. Sturgeon Public School Division routes travel 10,170 kilometers every day, which is 1,830,600 kilometers each school year.

Transportation Services operates from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm on operational days. The team focuses on managing bus dispatch, handling internal and external inquiries related to transportation services, processing transportation applications and addressing questions regarding school attendance boundaries.

The 2023-2024 school year start up went well for Transportation Services. Unlike some other divisions, Sturgeon Public School Division was fortunate to have all its routes covered by available bus operators on the first day of school. Building on feedback from previous years, Transportation Services implemented a few minor adjustments that contributed to an overall improved startup experience.

Some of the improvements included:

- more detailed bus passenger lists for bus contractors,
- bus lists provided to schools earlier; and
- transportation details being shared with families both new and returning.

Another important factor in the successful start up included two weeks of transportation support in the department from an additional casual staff member. This staff member came with previous years experience in the Division as well as a general understanding of transportation services. Having a casual employee work in Transportation Services with background knowledge resulted in less training time and excellent support for families.

The phone call and email volume, especially between August 14-September 8, remained quite high, as parents requested transportation information or changes to their requests for pickup and drop off. Overall, there are still improvements to be made to the start up process, but getting 3,000 students on buses for school was a great success!

Report Summary

This report provides an overview of Transportation Services for the 2023-2024 school year, presenting both highlights and challenges. Continued operations depend on the collaboration with local contractors and bus operators to ensure the safe transportation of students on a daily basis.

Ridership

Transportation Services has seen an increase in ridership from the 2022-2023 school year with approximately 120 additional students registered for transportation services for the start of the 2023-2024 school year.

Over the summer months, Transportation Services completed a review and optimization of all current transportation routes and were able to add two new routes with a focus on ride time reduction. The addition of the new routes were for Sturgeon Composite High School, as well as Camilla School. Transportation Services found that the new route in Camilla required additional time and attention as this is a new bus contractor with the Division. The Sturgeon Composite High School route addition was awarded to a current contractor which was a smooth transition.

Department Statistics

Sturgeon Public Schools provides transportation services on yellow buses which range from 15 passengers to 82 passengers. There are currently four buses which are designated for Special Education students. In addition, there are three parent provided transportation agreements supporting the transportation of eight students getting to school in an alternative way. The Department also has a co-operative agreement with Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord school division to provide transportation services to Legal Public School for one student.

Transportation Services has responded to many customer service requests including:

- 618 application forms between August 1 and September 29.
- 820 phone calls between August 1 and September 29.
- 47 bus pass replacement requests between September 7 and November 30.

Transportation Service Grants

Transportation Funding Application

Transportation Services has not submitted a grant application to Alberta Education since 2019. Since that time, the transportation funding has been frozen, with increases being applied to the 2019 submission amount. Transportation Services worked closely with schools as well as using the data available in PowerSchool to keep all information as current as possible. The grant application was submitted on November 30, 2023 and is currently awaiting review.

Fun Facts:

- The Transportation Grant submission is completed for all students, regardless if the students are currently riding a bus or not.
- The Transportation Grant Funding is based on the student's primary home location, even if the student is being transported to and from an alternate location such as a daycare.
- The Transportation Grant Funding has been adjusted to provide full funding for the home to school distance for students who are being transported to a school of choice.
- The Transportation Grant Funding has changed to allow Divisions to claim funding for students who live outside Division boundaries when a parent submits a Transfer of Student Transportation Funding Parent Declaration Form. Previously, the Division did not receive any transportation funding when providing bus service to these students.
- Students residing within the Town of Morinville limits will be claimed on an Urban Application as the population has exceeded 10,000. This is the first time Sturgeon Public Schools has been required to complete Urban Application.

School Bus Driver Grant

Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors (TEC) introduced a School Bus Driver Grant beginning April 1, 2023, which included two initiatives.

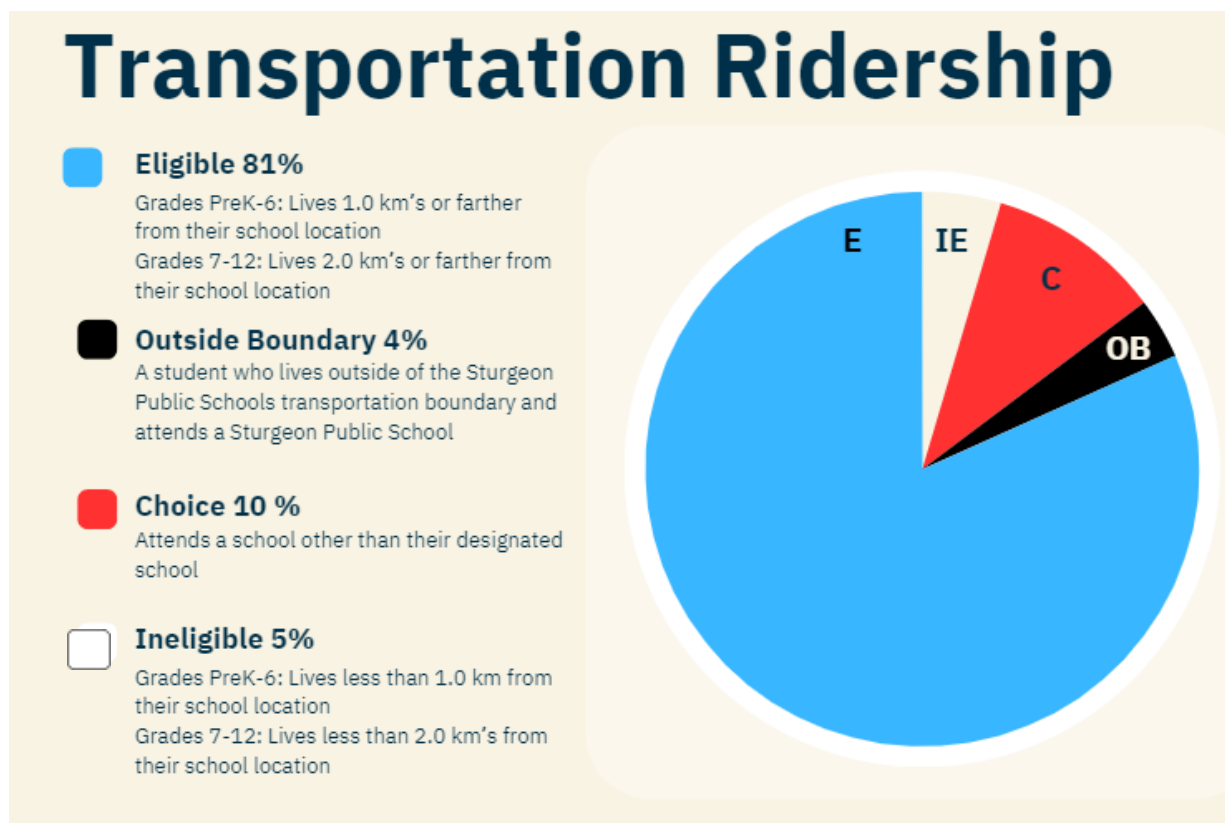
The first initiative was the Training Costs and Driver Reimbursement Grant. This grant is available for new Class 2 and Class 4 drivers upon successful completion of driver training and testing. A portion of the grant is to be provided for training costs and the remainder of the grant is for driver reimbursement. Transportation Services has facilitated two grant submissions resulting in \$8,000 being received by contractors and operators for the school bus driver grant.

The second initiative was the Driver Competency Training Grant. This section of the grant is for additional training post-licensing. To be eligible for the Driver Competency Training Grant, a driver must complete at least 50 hours of training over a six-month period that covers content in all nine competency areas. At this time, Transportation Services has not

submitted any applications for this grant but anticipates some applications to be submitted in 2024.

Transportation Services facilitates the School Bus Driver Grant submission process by receiving the applications from contractors, reviewing the information to confirm eligibility, and submitting these applications as well as a School Authority Information Form to Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors (TEC). Once approved, the grant dollars are received by Sturgeon Public Schools before being forwarded to the contractors.

2023-2024 Ridership



Communication

In case of bus delays exceeding five minutes or route cancellations, Transportation Services utilizes the Bus Status page. As soon as information is updated on the website's Bus Status page, automatic notifications are dispatched to all subscribed parents with students assigned to the affected route. This streamlined process facilitates quick access for parents and schools to stay informed about any route changes. Transportation Services strongly encourages parents and staff to download the app to ensure prompt receipt of notifications.

All buses are equipped with two-way radios, along with the Transportation Services office. This allows staff members to maintain radio communication with bus operators and provides an important line of contact while buses are en route.

Transportation Services provides weekly update emails to all contractors to ensure that information is being shared consistently. Along with the weekly updates, any individual contractor information is shared as required on a daily basis. Transportation Services also maintains an open door policy and often connects with contractors and bus operators face to face when time allows.

Safety & Compliance

Safely on Board

Transportation Services supports each of the school locations that have Preschool & Kindergarten classes in their buildings to be able to access the Safely on Board program. The program is interactive and hands-on. This content is geared directly to the age and maturity level of the Preschool & Kindergarten students. The program is divided into time in the classroom as well as outside, on and around the bus. This allows the opportunity for all students to receive the information in the program, rather than only bus students. Transportation Services financially supports this program for all of the Preschool & Kindergarten classes, if the school chooses to offer the program.

Route Assessments

Alberta Education requires the annual completion of a route assessment for every route. Transportation Services review the submitted forms highlighting any potential safety concerns that have been identified. Transportation Services then connects with Towns and Counties to bring forward any of the safety concerns which can be addressed, such as tree trimming or areas requiring road maintenance. The routes are also reviewed to eliminate hazards such as unsafe turnarounds whenever possible.

Bus Rules & Regulations

A review of the Bus Rules & Regulations was conducted as a result of conversations during the annual school start up meetings. The team enhanced the rules around cell phone use on the bus and updated the wording of the document to be more concise.

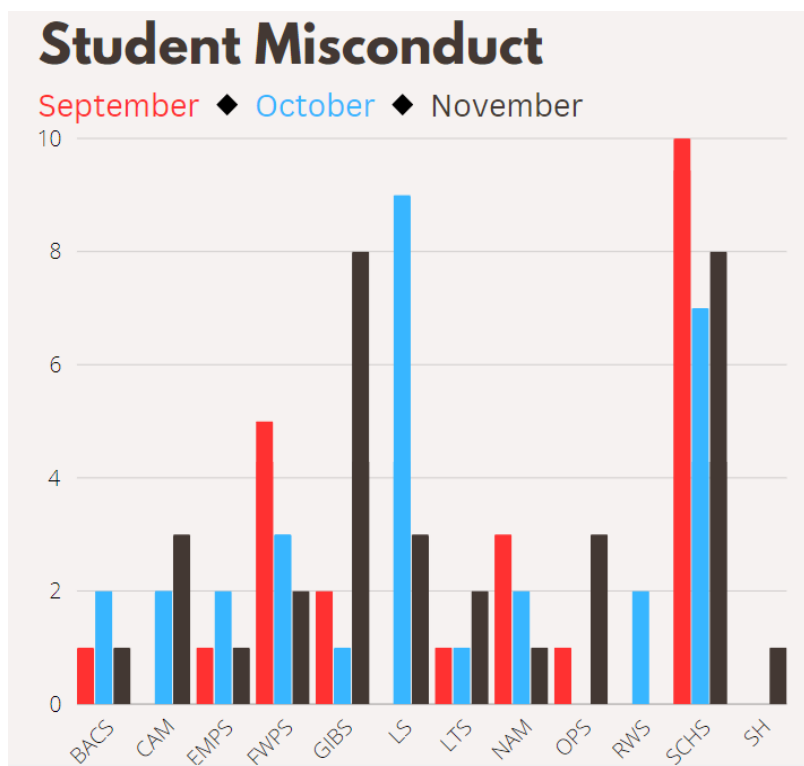
Transportation Services provided a copy of the Bus Rules & Regulations to all transportation families to ensure transparency of the enhancements made. In addition, the Bus Rules & Regulations was added to the end of the transportation online application form. Parents must acknowledge that they have carefully reviewed and discussed the bus rules and regulations with their child(ren) before they are able to submit their transportation application to request service.

Student Misconduct

Transportation Services continues to assist with a collaborative relationship between school administration and bus operators in addressing student misconduct on buses. Bus operators and contractors can report incidents through an accessible online form. This form

is then shared with school administration for review and action. By identifying patterns of misconduct, schools can establish connections between bus behavior and classroom conduct, enabling them to develop effective support plans for students. This proactive approach ensures the safety of all students during transportation.

Below is a chart representing the number of misconduct incidents where bus operators have requested support from school administration at each school location between September and November.



Bus Registration

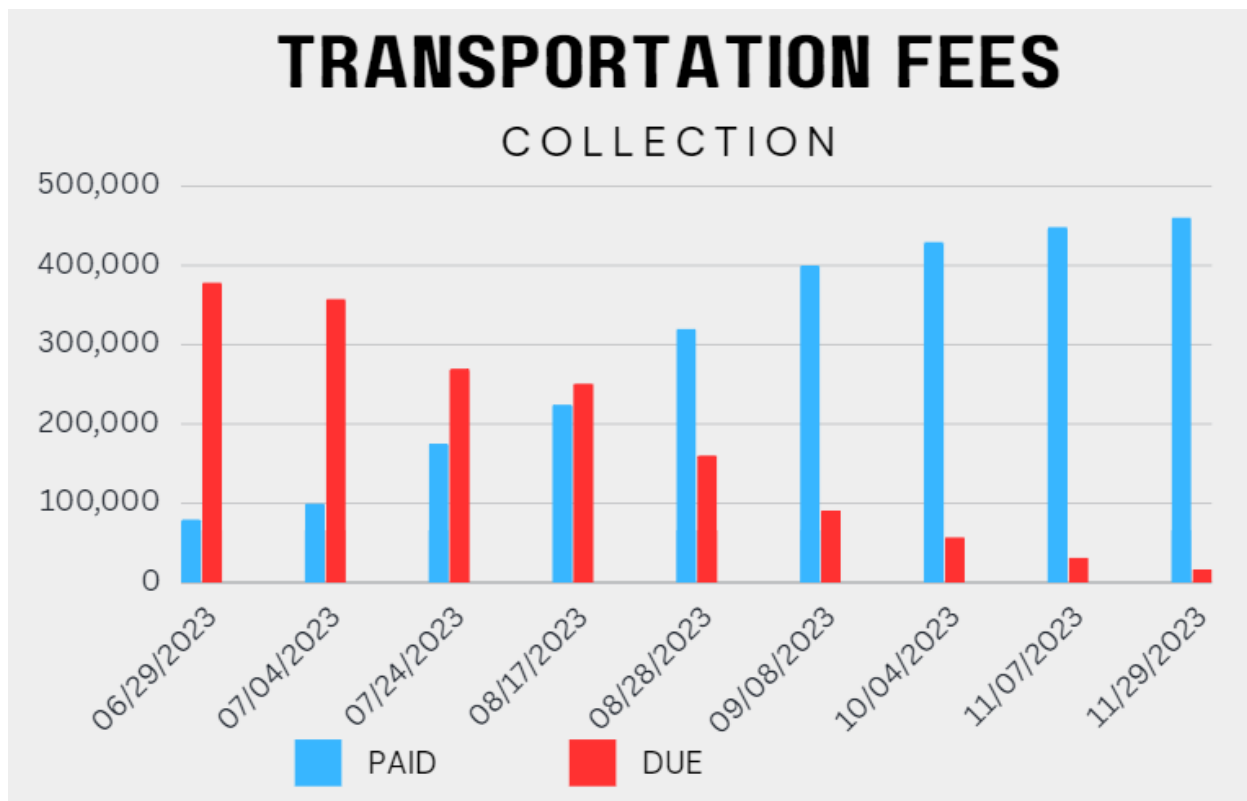
Transportation Services is already in the planning stages for the 2024-2025 school year. School registrations begin in February and in alignment with that date, transportation online applications will also be accepted. This allows parents to complete both required forms at the same time, which can be helpful for new families or families who have changes to make with their school or home locations.

Bus passes are issued to students once they have been registered and transportation service fees have been paid. This helps to track which students are assigned to each route. Transportation fees are posted to PowerSchool for payment as soon as mid-June for the upcoming school year.

2023-2024 Transportation Fee Collection

Transportation Services made a change to one of the fee categories for this school year. In the 2022-2023 school year, a fee category of “Choice” was added, which included students who were attending a School of Choice as well as students who were less than 2.4 kilometers from their school of residence. The change implemented split the “Choice” fee into two categories; “Choice” for students attending a School of Choice and “Ineligible” with the new criteria of less than 1 kilometer for Pre-K to Grade 6 and less than 2 kilometers for grades 7 to 12. This change allows Transportation Services to better track students being transported as well as more effectively determine transportation fees moving forward based on the Transportation Grant Funding received.

In the beginning months of the 2023-2024 school year, Transportation Services and school staff were intentional about transportation fee collection. Communication was sent out via email, paper statements and phone calls were made to ensure a variety of methods of communication were completed. Transportation Service suspensions occurred on November 27, 2023, as a last effort to collect transportation fees. As of December 1, 2023, the Department had a collection rate of 97% of all transportation fees assessed.



Challenges

Bus Operator Shortages

One common concern within Sturgeon Public Schools, as well as across the province, is bus operator shortages. Transportation Services has heard the most common concern is that there are no spare operators available, making it more difficult to cover absences of regular bus operators. Additionally, some bus contractors have been unable to apply for new transportation routes as they cannot find a bus operator to commit to a full time route. This has become a growing concern with our local contractors as it is a hindrance to their ability to compete.

Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors has implemented the Training Costs and Driver Reimbursement Grant to assist with the current bus operator shortages and encourage new operators to begin their careers. This will assist contractors in being able to provide financial support to get bus operators trained and out on the road. The team is hopeful that this additional funding will help to get some additional support in place within the Division.

Parent Expectations

With the changes to the funding available for transportation services, the Government also announced the expectation of reduced ride times and reduced transportation fees in the 2023-2024 school year. The expectations of parents continue to be a challenge for bus operators and Transportation Services to navigate. The team continues to work on keeping communication with parents from Transportation Services clear and concise. Working closely with schools continues to prove to be essential to ensure parents are receiving clear and consistent information.

Administration is prepared to respond to questions at the December 20, 2023, Public Board meeting.

Attachment(s):

Not applicable.