

Bloomfield Schools Board Proposal

Topic: Emergency Bus Driver Incentive Pay (Sign-on & Additional Route Pay Incentive)
Presenting: James Olivas (Director of Operations)
Date: 9/14/2021 (Addendum 1 1/10/2023)

Situational Narrative:

Everyday, our transportation department works hard to provide to-and-from student transport service. Since the start of the pandemic, our staff have had to rise to even greater expectations. They in fact have served as first responders by working on the front lines of the pandemic by delivering meals to students across our district thus supporting families in these challenging times.

The start of this school year has equally begun with many challenges due to the effects of the pandemic. Our staff has been working hard at providing to-and-from student delivery services with a limited amount of staff. Currently, it is requiring “all hands on deck” to maintain student transport services. Our director and our lead mechanic are driving routes to support the driver shortage we are currently experiencing. Some of the challenges we are facing include:

- Staff retiring thus creating a need to hire new drivers
- Staff leaving due to related challenges (double routing, pandemic protocols, fear of contracting COVID)
- Not enough drivers for the number of routes (currently have 13 routes and 10 drivers)
 - Equally impactful is that if a driver gets sick, that places a greater load on all other drivers. We actually had this experience this week when one of our drivers contracted COVID. Also life challenges make it difficult when a driver has an issue (family related, other type of sickness, etc..) and we are understaffed.
- Limited success in hiring new drivers
 - We have job listings posted on the website, in social media, on busses located around the city.

Proposed Solution:

The goal of this solution is to maintain current drivers as well as attract new drivers by incentivizing them with cash bonuses. For either option listed below, the individual will enter a contractual agreement to stay with the company in order to receive the incentive pay. Breach or early departure/termination will result in a loss of the incentive pay. The intent in receiving incentive pay is to hire new drivers and maintain their employment with Bloomfield Schools.

- New hires will receive a \$1,500 sign-on incentive that will be paid out in two installments (December & June).

Qualifications to become a driver

In order to become a bus driver, an individual must complete...

- 30.5 hours of bus training

- CPR training
 - First Aid training
 - Obtain a Commercial Learner's Permit
 - Pass a DOT physical
 - Pass written and driving test with the NMDMV
- Current drivers will receive \$750 if their normally assigned route requires to be double-up and such doubling up can be done safely. The incentive would cap out at \$1500 max for the year. The bonus will be paid out in two installments (December & June).
 - The route must not be a temporary route (few days or a couple of weeks)
 - The route duration must be at least 50% of the semester
 - The route must be conducted safely not jeopardizing student safety
 - The route must be approved by the Transportation Manager

Funding Stream

The district understands that throwing money at an issue is not and should never be a sole means to solve the problem. The district has exhausted all means to seek new drivers and is not facing this issue alone. In fact, nationally, school districts are struggling to find bus drivers and are equally faced with bus driver shortages. The link below shares these very struggles.

https://www.today.com/video/school-bus-driver-shortage-hits-communities-across-us-119025733742?playlist=mmlsnn_d_todarchivesthursday

Currently, the district is faced with taking strategic measures to improve our current situation through the use of cash incentives.

To fund this initiative, the district will utilize ESSER III funding which states

“(T) Other activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in local educational agencies and continuing to employ existing staff of the local educational agency.”

The district is looking to invest \$ 73,800.00 This includes incentives plus required benefits. This dollar value reflects the cap for this incentive but the actual amount could be less than the projected investment.

Addendum 1 (1.10.2023)

This addendum is to add a bonus pay incentive to bus assistants who were not included in the original incentive plan. Our bus assistants have had to work alongside our bus drivers as we have doubled up routes and made adjustments to bus rosters to meet the demands brought on by bus driver shortages. Bus assistants would receive a \$500 bonus if they meet the same

conditions as listed above. The incentive would cap out at \$1000 max for the year. The bonus will be paid out in two installments (December & June).

The initial incentive for the 2022-2023 school year will be retroactive for the first part of the 2022-2023 school year. Routes and staffing will be reassessed in January 2023 to determine if future bonus will be paid out.

The incentive program will expire upon the expiration of ESSER/ARP funding that was allotted for this incentive program.