



**Patchogue-Medford School District**

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**Review of Transportation**

**February 2016**

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The Board of Education  
Patchogue-Medford Union Free School District  
241 South Ocean Avenue  
Patchogue, NY 11772



Board of Education:

We have been retained to function as the internal auditor for the Patchogue-Medford Union Free School District (hereinafter, "the District"). Our responsibility is to assess internal control systems in place within the District, and to make recommendations to improve upon certain control weaknesses or deficiencies. In doing so, we hope to provide assurance to the District's Board, management, and residents, that the fiscal operations of the District are being handled appropriately and effectively.

**BACKGROUND:**

In conjunction with our internal audit responsibility, we assessed the adequacy of internal controls over transportation and recommended internal audit perform a review of this area with respect to policies and procedures, vehicle maintenance, fuel charges, inventory, and compliance with contracts.

The Transportation Department is responsible for establishing all bus routes for students in the District as well as coordinating transportation services for students who attend private or religious schools. The District owns eight large buses and contracts with Montauk Bus Company ("Montauk") for additional large buses, and Towne Bus Corporation ("Towne") for mini vans and summer transportation. The buses provide all transportation needs to and from school, as well as for athletic events and field trips. The District employs six bus drivers who are entitled to receive health benefits. Routes have been set using the Versatrans software system, and patterns have been reviewed by the District to determine cost effectiveness. The District performs their own bus maintenance and utilizes the village's fuel pumps for diesel fuel for the buses they own. Preventative maintenance is performed every week on the buses.

**SCOPE:**

While the majority of the District's transportation costs are reimbursed by the State, District officials have a responsibility to control these costs by ensuring appropriate policies and procedures are in place, reviewing routes for efficiency, and implementing cost effective business practices.

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:**

New York State law requires schools to have the following transportation policies.

### **No Idling Policy**

The District's No Idling Policy states that bus drivers are required to shut off engines while waiting for students to load or off-load. Exceptions to the policy where idling is permitted are during mechanical work, to maintain temperature for passenger comfort or in an emergency evacuation when necessary to operate wheelchair lifts.

### **Rider Eligibility Policy**

School bus transportation will be provided for all resident students to public and private schools they regularly attend in accordance with the mileage limited defined below:

- Kindergarten through fifth grade students must reside more than 1/2 mile from the school of attendance.
- Grades 6-8 students must reside more than 1 mile from the school of attendance.
- Grades 9-12 students must reside more than 1 1/2 miles from the school of attendance.
- Private school students must observe the transportation limits noted above and the school should not be more than 15 miles from the student's residence.

### **Student Conduct Policy**

The student conduct on school buses will be enforced by the bus drivers. The principals and the Superintendent are responsible for disciplining the student as necessary. Depending on the number of offenses by the student on a school bus, suspension of bus riding privileges may be handed out, which could exceed five days.

### **Drug and Alcohol Abuse Policy for School Bus Drivers**

This policy is intended to incorporate as its own and fully comply with the Department of Transportation drug and alcohol regulations. Alcohol and drug testing will be conducted on any current and/or prospective driver and/or an employee with a Commercial Driver's License who performs safety sensitive functions and operates a vehicle in excess of 26,000 pounds and/or a vehicle designed to carry 16 passengers (including the driver).

We reviewed the policies in place and they meet the requirements of New York State law. **No exceptions were noted.**

## **STUDENT ELIGIBILITY:**

To determine eligibility of resident students for transportation to schools they regularly attend, the distance is measured on a route over paved roads that are maintained by the village, town, county, or state and be the shortest possible alternative between the student's residence and the school of attendance. The starting point is the property line directly opposite the main entrance of the house. The stopping point is the main entrance of the school of attendance.

When a new student enters the district or moves within the district a form is filled out and given to the transportation office. Once the form is received by the transportation office, the Transportation Supervisor determines if the student is eligible for transportation by using Versatrans, the District's school bus routing software. If the student is eligible for transportation, the transportation office communicates the bus stop information to the school so that it can be communicated to the student. We reviewed 10 new student forms and noted that the students were eligible for transportation and the bus stop information was communicated to the appropriate school. **No exceptions were noted.**

#### **NON PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS:**

Nonpublic school students consist of private and parochial students, and transportation services for resident private and parochial school students are equal to that provided for resident public school students. Parents of nonpublic school students must complete and submit a *Private & Parochial School Application* by April 1<sup>st</sup> for the school year beginning in September. Proof of address is necessary to provide along with the application if the student is new to the district.

After the transportation office receives the *Private & Parochial School Application*, the information is entered into the Versatrans system. If the distance does not exceed the 15 mile limit, a bus stop is assigned to the student and communicated to the parents of the student. We reviewed 10 *Private & Parochial School Applications* and noted that each student did not exceed the 15 mile limit and were assigned a bus stop. Each form was completed and properly signed by the parent of the student and was dated and marked "Received" by the transportation department. **No exceptions were noted.**

#### **SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS:**

Any student with a disability is entitled to suitable transportation, as specified in the student's Individual Education Plan ("IEP"), to and from special classes or programs. The transportation department maintains records of the students who require higher special needs and BOCES. The Pupil Services department of the District provides the transportation department information of any changes to a student's IEP and confirms the transportation needs of the student. Each special education student receives a van, through the contract with Towne Bus Corp, and is transported in the way that their IEP calls for.

In order to test the transportation for special education students we selected 10 bus routes where the description of the route indicated that there were some special needs requirements. We then obtained the list of students on each of the routes and selected 2 students from each route. For each student selected, we confirmed that the transportation department has received a report from Pupil Services indicating any special transportation requirements and confirmed those requirements to the detailed bus route information. The transportation requirements were either an IEP in the student's file, or a

Transportation List report produced by PPS that indicates the requirements. Based upon our review of special education student transportation requirements, all transportation requirements are properly communicated to the transportation department and implemented in each bus route. **No exceptions were noted.**

**BUS ROUTES AND STOPS:**

Bus routes are established under the direction of the superintendent of schools. Bus routes are reviewed annually and adjusted as necessary by the Transportation Supervisor to minimize costs and maximize efficiency. Bus routes are established so that no student spends more than sixty minutes on a bus from the time of loading to the time of discharge. Authorized bus stops will be located in places where students can await the arrival of the buses with the utmost safety allowed by road conditions.

We tested the bus routes of the District by obtaining the 2015-2016 Bus Routes report from the Versastrans system and selecting 29 routes that included routes from each elementary school, each middle school, and the high school. We viewed the routes on the Versastrans system and ensured that all bus stops were outside of what is considered the walking area for each school. We also tested how long each route took and noted that most routes were between fifteen and twenty-five minutes. During our review of the routes we ensured that the routes created were the most efficient given the location of the bus stops by making sure the routes were completed in the shortest distance and in the shortest amount of time. All bus routes were less than the maximum of sixty minutes in length and none of the bus stops were located in places where the students would be in danger while waiting for the bus.

Towards the end of each school year the Transportation Supervisor begins the process of rolling over prior year students and removing students who graduated. The rollover procedures include giving students in Grade 12 a "99" code and moving other students up one grade or school, if applicable. This enables the District to remove the stop for those who are no longer students in the District. Once all eligible students are entered into the Versastrans system, establishing of routes begins.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the District look into obtaining GPS systems for each bus. This will allow the District to track on-time performance, student loading and unloading times, fuel usage, driving patterns, and consistent compliance with bus routes as planned. The GPS systems can also increase and improve on-time performance which supports greater route compliance which saves time and money.

In addition, we recommend that the District perform a ridership analysis halfway through the year to determine if any bus routes can be modified to increase efficiency for any students who no longer take the bus to school. As per part 156.2(b) of the Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and

Regulations of the State of New York, approved seating capacities are to be determined on the basis of the number of pupils legally entitled to transportation and the District may also choose to modify the bus route when the originally approved capacity is no longer required.

**STUDENT SAFETY REGULATIONS:**

As required by New York State, three bus drills must be held during the school year. The District performs these drills within the first ten days of school, between November 1 and December 31, and between April 1 and May 30.

All bus drivers are required to follow certain rules and regulations while operating the school bus. The district has a strict "Hands-Off" Policy, which means that no physical contact whatsoever unless it is to prevent a passenger from getting physical hurt or hurting someone else. Other rules include no eating or drinking on the bus at any time, wearing seat belts properly at all times, and never getting involved with a parent concerning student management, schedules or conditions of the bus.

If, for any reason, there are disciplinary problems on the bus, the bus driver is required to first correct discipline problems by asking the student to observe proper behavior. If that does not work the bus driver must complete the *Conduct Report* and send it to the school principal after more than one verbal warning has been given to the student. The principal will notify the parents and a copy of the report will be sent to the bus company. For a third offense by a student, the *Chronic or Severe Bus Discipline Report* should be completed and sent to the school principal. The principal will contact the parents and hold a conference with the parents if the student is suspended. If the student commits a fourth offense, the bus driver will complete a *Chronic or Severe Bus Discipline Report* and send it to the principal. The student will be suspended from riding the bus and a conference will be held with the parents. Based on the procedures in place, the District has implemented proper protocols to ensure student safety is adequately addressed. No exceptions were noted.

**CONTRACTS:**

The District has a contract with Montauk Bus Company and Towne Bus Corp for transportation services. The contracts are for three years with an option to extend for another two years. The District uses Montauk for their big buses and Towne for their mini buses and for any buses needed over the summer. Any new contracts entered into by the District are reviewed by the Superintendent before being signed.

The District employs 6 bus drivers, 5 driving routes and one spare driver. All driver qualification procedures and standards follow Article 19-A of the New York State Vehicle & Traffic Law and the New York State Education Department. Requirements under Article 19-A include reviewing a driver's record to verify that a medical examination and a behind the wheel road test have been performed. Additionally a background check to

include fingerprinting and a criminal history check must be performed with the New York State Department of Motor Vehicle. Once a driver has been approved, they are re-qualified for continued employment annually by completing an examination to determine physical condition, an oral/written examination, and a biennial physical performance test. The results of these tests are maintained in the drivers 19-A file in the transportation office.

We selected four district bus drivers to test to ensure they meet the necessary requirements to drive a school bus. We reviewed the driver's 19-A file noting they passed the required examinations and tests. We also reviewed their personnel file noting that they passed all the initial requirements to become a driver. For drivers that are not District employees, the District receives an Abstract of Driving Record from the bus companies showing they are qualified drivers. We selected 36 drivers that are employed by either Montauk or Towne to ensure they were meeting the necessary driver requirements. All of the drivers tested were deemed to be qualified. **No exceptions were noted.**

#### **VEHICLE MAINTENANCE:**

Each driver is required to complete a Pre-Trip and a Post-Trip Inspection of their bus. Any defects noted are to be reported on the *Daily Defect Report*. These reports are turned into the mechanic and only the mechanic can sign off on the report to release the bus. Preventative maintenance, such as fluid, battery, and brake checks, is performed every week on the buses. Every Monday morning all buses have fluids checked and the fluid levels are recorded on the *Bus Service Record Sheet*. Buses are inspected by the mechanic on a bi-monthly basis. The information from these inspections is recorded on the *Vehicle Check List*.

The mechanic maintains a list of all parts that have been replaced on any vehicle. Before purchasing any parts for the buses, the mechanic has to check with the transportation office. The District has a contract with T&T Baldwin Automotive for bus repairs for the 2015-2016 school year. All receipts are turned into the transportation office after purchasing. Purchase orders are set up with certain stores and do not maintain a large stock of parts so they order parts as they go.

The Department of Transportation ("DOT") performs checks on the buses at a service station twice a year. All of the buses have passed their inspections.

As part of our review of vehicle maintenance on the buses, we selected two district buses and reviewed the repair logs, receipts of repairs, DOT inspection results, and the vehicle check lists for two months of the 2015-2016 school year. We ensured that all repair logs were on file, up to date, and signed off on. We reviewed the receipts for any repairs to determine reasonableness of the repair and to make sure they agreed with the requested repair. We obtained copies of the DOT inspection reports and noted that no major defects were indicated and that the buses received a passing grade. We reviewed the vehicle

check lists and noted that they were current and signed off by the mechanic. **No exceptions were noted.**

**Auditor's comment:** We recommend that the District track all repairs made to District buses by individual bus rather than to all District buses as a whole. This will allow the District to easily see which buses are receiving more repairs than other buses.

**FUEL USAGE:**

The District shares diesel fuel with the Village of Patchogue (the "Village") and purchases their own fuel independently for their buses. When a bus driver finishes their day they complete a form showing the routes they drove, the time it took, the odometer reading at the beginning and end of the day, and the gallons of diesel received, if any.

We selected two district buses to test their fuel logs and compared them to the monthly invoices received from the Village for the 2015-16 school year. We reviewed the daily bus usage reports that were completed by the bus drivers to ensure they were completed properly and signed off on. We agreed the dates the bus was filled up on and the number of gallons received per the daily report to the records received from the Village. We noted that the total number of gallons received from the Village was reconciled to the District's records. Based upon our review, the District monitors fuel usage appropriately. **No exceptions were noted.**

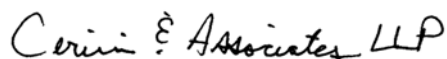
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We would like to thank the staff at the District for their cooperation and professionalism during our review.

We understand the fiduciary duty of the Board of Education, as well as the role of the internal auditor in ensuring that the proper control systems are in place and functioning consistently with the Board's policies and procedures.

Should you have any questions regarding anything included in our report, please do not hesitate to contact us at (631) 582-1600.

Sincerely,



Cerini & Associates, LLP  
Internal Auditors



Recommendation	Response
<p>The District should consider obtaining a GPS system for each bus in order to track on-time performance, student loading and unloading times, fuel usage, driving patterns, and consistent compliance with planned bus routes.</p>	<p>The District is in the process of procuring a GPS system for the District owned buses. Currently, such a provision is not in the District contracts with Montauk Bus Company or Towne Bus. The District will discuss the recommendation with the bus companies in order to determine if the GPS may be installed under the current contract.</p>
<p>The District should perform a ridership analysis halfway through the year to determine if any bus routes could be modified to increase efficiency for students no longer taking the bus to school.</p>	<p>The District monitors ridership on a regular basis throughout the year and will continue to review at least every October, January and April.</p>
<p>Repairs to District vehicles should be tracked by individual buses. Currently the repairs are not sorted by individual District owned buses.</p>	<p>The District has implemented this recommendation.</p>