



SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE REPORT 2015-2016

6/30/16

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Dear Colleagues:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Association of Pupil Transportation, (MAPT) this report is being submitted to summarize the activities of the Massachusetts Special Education Transportation project funded by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for the 2015-2016 fiscal year.

In January 2016, the DESE solicited an RFP for contracted work as supported by the Task Force. A two-year contract was awarded to MAPT in March 2016.

The scope of services includes, ongoing coordination of the taskforce, support of the website, www.SpEdTransSavings.org, provide a resource for school districts and conduct on-site district reviews to identify cost savings and maximize efficiencies.

The October DESE SIMS data is made available on-line to provide school districts and program personnel with another tool to use as they strive to maintain high quality cost-effective transportation for all special education students in the Commonwealth.

We believe that this project continues to demonstrate opportunities for multi-district routing and provides districts with information that will help them to make sound fiscal decisions and maximize cost benefits. District reviews can have a direct impact on creating cost savings initiatives that can be sustained over time.

Respectfully submitted,

Colleen Cavanaugh

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Background

Transporting our special needs students continues to be a challenge facing school districts across the Commonwealth, and in many cases the cost of transportation exceeds the tuition. The total expended by public schools in FY2015 for out-of-district special education transportation services was \$ 96,074,023, transporting 8,769 students, as reported on the DESE End of the Year Report, Schedule 7.

As part of the State's on-going efforts to create efficiencies in the area of Special Education Transportation and reduce costs, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has continued to support the State Special Education Task Force on various initiatives. An on-line resource, *SpEdTransSavings.org*, provides total enrollment as shown on the October 1 DESE SIMS report and vendor data to facilitate transportation services. This data allows school districts and program administrators to explore the potential cost benefit of multi-district routing and expedite services.

Past year efforts were focused on developing and enhancing the website, creating an on-line data application, conducting outreach and providing district support when requested.

According to October 1 DESE SIMS data, 10,346, attended 406 special education out of district programs in FY2016. Note this is total enrollment, not all students receive transportation services. Special education administrators have stated they do not necessarily know if students from neighboring communities are attending the same out of district placement as students from their town.

Districts have indicated that it is sometimes difficult to find transportation vendors to transport students, especially for those students that have moved to another community.

Purpose

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provided funding in FY2016 to support initiatives set forth in the Request for Proposal, (RFP). Funding will be provided to continue to provide school districts with information that can be utilized to generate cost savings and maintain a high-quality standard in the area of Special Education Transportation. The task force will provide a

matching grant to conduct on-site district reviews of special education transportation operations. As part of the initiative, the web site, <http://www.spedtranssavings.org>, will continue to provide districts with the most current DESE Special Education Enrollment data, which encompasses all special education programs in the State. Districts will also be provided tools to assist them in utilizing this data and other information pertaining to bid specifications, sample contracts, and cost guidelines that can further assist them in their daily operations.

Presentations will be conducted across the State to advocate the use of the web site. Support will be available on a daily basis to school districts and program directors to assist them in all areas of Special Education Transportation. The key to saving money in special education transportation is to maximize the number of students on a vehicle, and to share the costs of that vehicle. The website will provide school district administrators with a tool to assist them in identifying other neighboring districts that are also transporting students to similar schools. This information can also assist with new placements as districts seek to provide transportation services.

Process

Districts can utilize the district data tab on the website to look at programs they send students to or they can view the Oct 1 DESE Sims data which provides statewide enrollment. This information can be exported into an Excel spreadsheet and sorted to show districts other communities within close proximity that may be sending students to that same program. Districts should then reach out to that district to explore a ride share potential.

In many cases school districts own and operate their own vehicles, by sharing the cost of that route with another district, they can reduce their operating budget.

Outcomes

The contract was awarded in March with an end date of June 30, 2016. Much of the work focused on building the contractor's (MAPT) website in accordance with the specifications set forth in the RFP and develop the district review process. The October 1 DESE SIMS data for FY16 was uploaded to the website. An analysis of the data is provided below:

DESE OCTOBER 1 SIMS DATA FOR FY16

Program Type	Number of Programs	Number of Students	%
Collaborative Program	188	4,069	39%
Institutional Program	11	192	2%
Massachusetts State Agency	1	75	1%
Out-of-State School	62	301	3%
Public School	2	2	0%
Special Education School	141	5,706	55%
Unknown	1	1	0%
Grand Total	406	10,346	100%

The district review process was developed to include but not be limited to;

- ✓ Review all contracts and processes used for obtaining transportation services
- ✓ Review the role of district personnel in arranging services
- ✓ Explore option of district operated program
- ✓ Conduct analysis of transportation budget and actual route costs
- ✓ Review IEP process as it pertains to transportation
- ✓ Review school committee policies as they relate to transportation services
- ✓ Utilize SpedTransSavings website data to explore potential route share opportunities
- ✓ Interview:
 - Special Education office personnel
 - Transportation vendors
 - Other as requested by the district

A brochure was developed and shared with the State associations to inform them of the website and the district review process.

Six districts expressed an interest in the review after the MASBO May Institute. One review was conducted. The district indicated it was very beneficial and they expect to realize initial cost savings for

the upcoming year with a plan to save more in future years as a result of the study. They stated the overall experience was very helpful.

Conclusion

The October 1 DESE SIMS Data provides districts with information for all special education programs in the state and can assist in the transportation planning process.

The contract was awarded for two years and activities will continue to be funded in FY2017. Activities include:

- Continuation of services provided now
 - Website
 - District Support
 - Presentations to State Associations
 - Maintain Vendor Database
- On-site District transportation reviews with a 50% cost share by the district

The website provides school districts and program personnel with another tool to use as they strive to maintain high quality cost-effective transportation for all special education students in the Commonwealth. Special Education reviews directly impact a district and identify areas in which they can realize substantial savings.