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Howard County Public School System

August 10, 2023

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Michael J. Martirano, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Subject: Update on School Start Times Implementation and Transportation

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information to members of the Board related to the implementation of new school start times and related transportation issues. During the Board's meeting on July 13, 2023, Board members asked several questions and raised several issues that will be addressed in this memo. Additionally, more questions were received since the last Board meeting from members of the community which are also addressed in this memo. Any questions from this memo not currently addressed in our online FAQs will be added and this memo will be published to BoardDocs with the next School Start Times report.

It is important to remember that prior to the expansion of non-transportation areas in Policy 5200, over 14,000 HCPSS students who reside in existing non-transportation areas have been getting to and from school by means other than HCPSS bus transportation. Policy 5200 added an additional 3,500 students to the original 14,000 students. Additionally, students who do not receive bus transportation have always been at the forefront of considerations when events such as inclement weather, school emergencies, and community incidents occur.

While it is included in policy that parents are to ensure the safety of their children during their commute between their home and the school bus or school property, we understand the reality is not all parents, guardians or caretakers are able to drive their children or walk with them as they travel to and from their destination each day. The safety of our children requires a collaborative effort between families, school staff, police, the County, and all members of the community. School administrators and Central Office staff will continue to enhance that collaborative effort to keep our children safe and respond quickly when a concern arises.

We are on-track to provide transportation to all qualifying students beginning the first day of school and we are closely monitoring the ongoing hiring status of contractors as they continue to fill their vacancies.

I continue to engage with Board of Education members as well as elected and community leaders throughout the implementation of this process. This afternoon (August 10, 2023), I will be meeting with several elected leaders to provide them with the updates contained in this memo.

During the School Start Times Report at the Board of Education meeting on July 13, 2023, the following motion was passed:

> *Move that the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to have staff conduct a review of the first 60 days of transportation and non-transportation areas to assess what's working and not working. The assessment will include, but not be limited to, attendance tracking for students no longer receiving transportation for the 2023-2024 school year compared to historic attendance in these areas. It will also review safety incidents compared with historic trends. The assessment should include recommendations for remediation of identified areas of concern.*

A team of HCPSS central office staff has been convened to provide this assessment to the Board following the first 60 days of school. However, staff will be keenly monitoring transportation processes every day and alleviating any concerns that arise as quickly as possible. Communication will be ongoing each day between central office staff, school staff and families.

Included in this memo is a chart that lists the start times for every district in the state and a separate chart that lists the transportation distances for all levels for every district in the state so you may see how Howard County compares. Additionally, some pieces of information provided in the memo dated July 7, 2023 has been included here to keep all relevant information in one place.

Staff from the offices of School Management and Instructional Leadership, Student Transportation, and Communications have met with school administrators throughout the summer and provided them with information and updates, answered their questions, and created messaging and resources for them to support and share with the families in their school communities.

Due to the length of this memo, an index has been included for easy navigation.

Copy to: Executive Staff
Board of Education Office

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The Decision to Change School Start Times

On April 15, 2021, the Board of Education directed the Superintendent to review and evaluate the current student school start times and to prepare a recommendation of suggested new start times for the 2022-2023 school year. On February 10, 2022, the Board voted to approve the recommended timeline to develop adjusted school start times for anticipated implementation during the 2023-2024 school year. As part of the process to make the changes feasible logistically and financially, the Board approved necessary changes to Policy 5200 – Student Transportation on May 26, 2022. Finally, after a comprehensive Board process that was led by a consultant from Decision Support Group, the Board approved making changes to school start times for the 2023-2024 school year on February 23, 2023.

The driving purpose behind the Board's decision to push back the start of school to a later time was because of the overwhelming data and research that indicates later start times allow students more sleep, positively impacting their ability to remain alert during the instructional day. I continue to support the purpose behind the Board's decision, and we were able to make a decision that is being considered in districts across the nation.

Modifying Policy 5200 – Student Transportation
To make the desired adjustments to school start times in a no cost or low-cost manner, Policy 5200 - Student Transportation required modification. The most significant change to policy was an expansion in non-transportation areas. The changes made to non-transportation areas make them comparable to other districts and are as follows:

- Pre-K: from .50 to 1 mile
- K - Grade 5: 1 mile (unchanged)
- Grade 6 through Grade 8: from 1 mile to 1.5 miles
- Grade 9 through Grade 12: from 1.5 to 2 miles

Additionally, for elementary school students, distance from bona fide residence to school is now based on measurements from residence property line to school property line. Previous policy language measured distance from bona fide residence property line to school entrance/door. For middle and high schools, however, the bona fide residence property line to school property line was already current practice. An adjustment was also made to the upper allowable limit of distance to a bus stop in such a way that the walking distance from a student's bona fide residence to an established school bus stop is no greater than the eligibility for transportation distance as outlined in Section III.F.1. With that said, we do not currently have any bus stops further than 1 mile from a student's residence.

Finally, the policy now allows for a transportation registration process to be instituted in order to establish an efficient student transportation system.

There are several benefits of the policy changes made by the Board, including:

- Enabling an adjustment to school start times in a low cost or no cost manner while considering the ongoing driver shortage,
- Ensuring efficient use of transportation resources, and
- Maximizing transportation service effectiveness.

Update on hiring drivers by transportation contractors
We received information last night (Wednesday, August 9, 2023) that one of our existing contractors, Blue Horizons Inc., has decided to terminate its business with HCPSS effective immediately. The Office of Student Transportation is analyzing the impact of this decision and planning for the 29 routes that were being covered by Blue Horizon.

Zum Services, Inc. needs a total of 230 drivers to support the routes they are covering. They have currently hired 130 drivers with 71 certificated drivers currently going through the hiring and training process and an additional 66 non-certified drivers completing their CDL training. Additionally, they have 40 drivers ready to be deployed from other jurisdictions for the first week of school should unforeseen delays prevent the candidates currently in the pipeline from becoming drivers. Tip Top has a total of 58 routes. All other contractors need a total of 212 drivers for their routes and were offered the opportunity to return contracts that they could not staff. As a result, 87 routes were returned, with the contractors retaining the 212 routes for which they have sufficient staffing.

As a result, HCPSS Transportation staff is confident that all 503 routes will be covered.

Additionally, HCPSS will continue to support our transportation contractors who request additional marketing and promotional assistance to fill their vacancies.

Contracting With Zum Services, Inc.
Language in our existing contracts and past RFPs greatly limited our ability to adjust or cancel contracts that were not being fulfilled. We issued an RFP and all transportation companies (new and current providers) had the ability to submit a proposal and were encouraged to do so during meetings with HCPSS staff.

HCPSS staff reviewed the submissions and chose the contracts that were best for the needs of our district. This included Zum, which is based in California. This company serves several major districts across the country and is confident they are able to fill all required routes because of their competitive pay and the benefits packages they offer drivers.

Only one local company, Tip Top Transportation, put in a bid and they were also awarded a contract.

These two companies will serve 288 routes and the remaining routes will be served by other local contractors we will continue to use to fulfill the routes that the newly awarded contracts will not be able to cover. The newly awarded contracts are inclusive of fuel, mileage, summer school, special education, athletic events, field trips and other bus services.

In addition, the new contracts give us the flexibility to increase or decrease the number of buses up to 10% within the existing pricing structure while the previous contracts required a new bid or temporary contracts and did not guarantee service for those adjustments.

DEMARCATION LINE DECISION

There has been significant conversation related to students who are inside the non-transportation area but outside the distances set forth in Policy 5200.

In section I.B in the Implementation Procedures for Policy 5200, it states:

> *In establishing the demarcation line between transported and non-transported areas, the Student Transportation Office may extend these distances to coincide with breaks in the pattern of homes, such as cul-de-sac, street intersections, major roadways, streams, parks, walking easements, commercial property, vacant land, unusual contour variations, and other features.*

The purpose of this language was to allow flexibility for the Student Transportation Office to account for natural boundaries in neighborhoods and streets and prevent situations that may compromise safety such as buses having to turn around in tight cul-de-sacs.

This chart includes the total number of students who are part of a non-transportation area but outside the stated distance set forth in Policy 5200.

Distance Beyond Policy (miles)	**0.01-0.1**	**0.11-0.2**	**0.21-0.3**
Elementary School	136	36	0
Middle School	7	0	0
High School	42	30	8

There are no students in the non-transportation area who are more than .3 mile from the posted distance as measured by the Office of Student Transportation's routing software – which serves as the official source of travel distances.

However, following concerns raised by members of the Board of Education on the way Policy 5200 was being implemented as it relates to the demarcation line, **I have directed staff to adhere strictly to the non-transportation area distances set forth in Policy 5200 and not leverage the flexibility to expand these distances as set forth in the policy's Implementation Procedures**. This will provide transportation to an additional 259 students who fall within the non-transportation area outside the distances set forth in Policy 5200.

There are several realities that surface as a result of the decision to provide transportation to the 259 students who are inside the non-transportation area but outside the distances set forth in Policy 5200. These include:

- At all but one school, the dividing line will fall mid-street—meaning one house will receive bus transportation and their next-door neighbor will not.
- Some students previously in the demarcation area will walk past non-transportation area students to get to their bus stop. An example of this is a cul-de-sac where students in the cul-de-sac who now qualify for transportation will have to walk to a bus stop located on a different street in the transportation area, walking past several houses that do not qualify for transportation services.
- Up to 10 minutes would be added to the existing transportation routes for many students.
- Some students will have to ride past the school after being picked up so the driver may pick up students who are already in the transportation zone. An example of this is Atholton Elementary School where all buses currently operate south of the school but this change in the non-transportation area requires one or more buses to pass to the north side of the school to pick up nearly 10 students who would now qualify for bus transportation. These are students who have historically been in the non-transportation area due to the demarcation language in the Policy 5200 Implementation Procedures.
- There will be instances at a handful of schools where students will need to walk nearly a mile to a bus stop to avoid placing a bus stop inside the non-

transportation area or adding a minivan.
- Over two dozen students who did not receive transportation in prior years are now eligible for transportation.

Transportation routing software remains the official means of measuring distances rather than tools such as mobile map apps, car odometers, or walking wheels.

Staff from the Office of Student Transportation are working to incorporate these changes into their planning and working with school administrators to notify impacted families by August 15, 2023.

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

Agreement with Local Transportation Contractors
The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) has reached agreement with local transportation contractors to continue providing bus service to HCPSS. This agreement is an amicable resolution of our respective concerns about the contract issues raised in the contractors' dismissed lawsuit and allows all parties to move forward in support of our joint mission of meeting the transportation needs of Howard County's students.

Buses required for the approved exemptions to redistricting to open Guilford Park High School
The Board of Education approved several exemptions to the redistricting decisions to open Guilford Park High School for the 2023-2024 school year. These exemptions result in approximately 25 additional buses being necessary beyond the anticipated total allotment of 478. These routes are being incorporated into the master planning by the Office of Student Transportation.

Addressing pickup overlaps at bus stops
Possibilities exist where buses for multiple school levels or even multiple schools will be picking up students from a common bus stop at similar times. For example, buses transporting students at a middle and high school that has the same start time may share a bus stop location. The Office of Student Transportation is considering this possibility as they are finalizing the routing and will mitigate the issue at as many locations as possible to prevent concerns with students being at a bus stop at the same time and potentially boarding the wrong bus. This issue will be addressed with the drivers in advance so that they can be clear about which students they will be picking up when students riding on different buses are at the same bus stop at the same time. This situation will be monitored as the school year starts.

If a parent submits an appeal to a student transportation decision, what is entailed in the appeal process and where is that process posted? How is a verdict reached?

The Implementation Procedures outlined in Policy 5200 detail the appeals process under section V. Walking Route and School Bus Stop Appeals, where it states:

A. Parents who have a concern about their student's walking route or school bus stop location will contact the Student Transportation Office to indicate their concern.
B. If the parent disagrees with the response from the area manager, the parent will be provided a Walking Route and School Bus Stop Appeal form.
C. Walking Route and School Bus Stop Appeals must be submitted to the Student Transportation Office in writing, using the Walking Route Appeal Survey or the School Bus Stop Survey forms.
D. Appeals will be forwarded to the Student Walking Route and Bus Stop Review Committee, who will submit its findings and recommendations to the Superintendent/designee.
E. The Superintendent/designee will review the committee's findings and recommendations, as well as those of the Student Transportation Office, and render a decision that will be communicated to the appellant.
F. If the appellant is not satisfied with the Superintendent's decision, a final written appeal may be made to the Board of Education.

What is the current status of appeals that have been submitted?
At the time of this memo, 95 total appeals had been completed and communicated. Of those 95, it was determined that 20 students should be placed back in a transportation area. Families have been notified of the decision. Staff from the HCPSS Office of Student Transportation are making those modifications and updating the corresponding transportation area maps.

There are currently 5 total active appeals.

Additionally, at this time, 7 of the 75 families that did not have their appeal upheld have appealed to the Board of Education.

The Office of Student Transportation continues working through the process detailed in the Implementation Procedures for Policy 5200 as quickly as possible, understanding that this process requires the Student Walking Route and Bus Stop Review Committee, made up of government agencies and a community member, to consider the appeal.

If families are not happy with the appeal outcome, is there a next step in the process?
If the appellant is not satisfied with the decision, a final written appeal may be made to the Board of Education. This process is detailed in the Policy 5200 Implementation Procedures:

V. Walking Route and School Bus Stop Appeals

A. Parents who have a concern about their student's walking route or school bus stop location will contact the Student Transportation Office to indicate their concern.

B. If the parent disagrees with the response from the area manager, the parent will be provided a Walking Route and School Bus Stop Appeal form.
C. Walking Route and School Bus Stop Appeals must be submitted to the Student Transportation Office in writing, using the Walking Route Appeal Survey or the School Bus Stop Survey forms.
D. Appeals will be forwarded to the Student Walking Route and Bus Stop Review Committee, who will submit its findings and recommendations to the Superintendent/designee.
E. The Superintendent/designee will review the committee's findings and recommendations, as well as those of the Student Transportation Office, and render a decision that will be communicated to the appellant.
F. If the appellant is not satisfied with the Superintendent's decision, a final written appeal may be made to the Board of Education.

How is the community resident chosen for the walking safety committee?
The Student Walking Route and Bus Stop Review Committee has been in place for years and consists of three members: the Howard County Bureau of Highways Traffic Engineering Division, the Howard County Office of Transportation, and a community citizen. The citizen is a volunteer who demonstrates a wealth of knowledge in this area and is familiar with the entire county transportation infrastructure.

Staff from HCPSS are not part of this committee, which is intentional to maintain impartiality.

HCPSS avoids any conflicts of interest with individuals selected to serve on this committee as HCPSS policy states, "Persons with a pending student walking route and school bus stop appeal will be temporarily prohibited from participating in related activities of the Student Walking Route and School Bus Stop Review Committee."

When the Walking Route Committee receives the appeal document that parents submit, they respond to the location and walk the routes specifically looking for the stated parent concerns as well as any other concerns that were not mentioned in the document. After observations have been made, the committee discusses noted issues, any improvements that can or cannot be made, and then submits its recommendations to HCPSS staff.

Could transportation services be returned to elementary students who now reside in non-transportation areas as a result of changes made to Policy 5200 if efficiencies, additional drivers, and additional funding were discovered?
Changes made to Policy 5200 affect approximately 1,000 students from prekindergarten through grade 5 who now live in non-transportation areas. Making a change for just elementary students would result in the need for approximately 24 additional bus routes. Regardless of additional drivers or funding, Policy 5200 does not allow for an adjustment to reduce non-transportation areas for any students, including just elementary students.

Updates on several community considerations
The Office of Student Transportation has been working with families and school administrators at several schools to evaluate and consider concerns and be sure all transportation routes and decisions result in students being able to safely travel to and from school. Here are updates on a few of those communities.

Phelps Luck ES - After further consideration, the Office of Student Transportation made the decision to move many students back into the transportation area as a result of further evaluation. There continues to be concerns by families in the two apartment complexes on Tamar Drive but there was no concern determined about the ability of students in these homes to travel safely to and from school. The school's incoming and outgoing Principal and the Hispanic Liaison are communicating with families about these transportation changes.

Fulton ES – The decision communicated in this memo to change the demarcation line will reinstate bus transportation for approximately 50 students who attend Fulton Elementary School. The majority of remaining families of students who have submitted appeals will continue to be in the non-transportation area. In a few cases, additional signage and crosswalks are being added or improved to enhance transportation safety. There was also a determination to perform a traffic study at the intersection of Maple Lawn Boulevard and Market Street during the start of the school year to make a determination if a crossing guard is necessary. Finally, staff believe that improvements made to the traffic pattern for exiting the Fulton campus will result in safer and more efficient traffic realities. A dedicated left turn lane was added for vehicles exiting campus onto Route 216 and a multi-directional lane was designated for vehicles turning left, continuing straight, or turning right onto Route 216.

Rockburn ES - The appeals submitted by families of students who attend Rockburn Elementary School have been upheld so they will not be moved back into the transportation area.

Hammond ES / Hammond MS - Representatives from the Office of Student Transportation, School Management and Instructional Leadership, as well as the principals of Hammond ES and Hammond MS recently collaborated to analyze options related to traffic patterns during arrival and dismissal. Options discussed placement of cars and buses of the two schools, as well as the pathways for walkers. Through the discussions, a safe and clear pattern has been established, in which the placement of buses will be in the lane closest to the two school buildings and placement of cars will be in the lane furthest from the building. There will be clearly defined parking spots for the buses serving the Hammond ES students and the Hammond MS students. Staff from both schools will be assigned to areas serving cars, buses, and walkers to ensure students can safely access their mode of transportation to and from school. Communication to community members will be sent out prior to the first day of school, in which the arrival and dismissal process is clearly explained. Ongoing collaboration will take place throughout the school year between the two principals and if adjustments need to be

made, the Office of Transportation and School Management and Instructional Leadership will be contacted.

Oakland Mills MS / Oakland Mills HS - Recently, two school-based and central office-based staff collaboration meetings were held to review options to redirect anticipated traffic on Kilimanjaro Road, where both schools are located. Accordingly, all parent/guardian drop-off for Oakland Mills HS is being directed to Blandair Park and all parent guardian drop-off for Oakland Mills MS is being directed to the Oakland Mills Interfaith Center's drop-off loop. For the Oakland Mills MS community, select parents/guardians have been using this drop-off location for years, however, it will be expanded to all parents/guardians for the 2023-2024 school year. This decision included a review of the upcoming Oakland Mills MS replacement school project and the "no stopping area" on Santiago Road. School communications are forthcoming to assist in socializing these decisions to the school communities. In addition, the new drop off and pick up processes will be assessed throughout the beginning of the school year and families will be surveyed so necessary adjustments will be made.

Special Education Transportation Considerations
Although there are impacts to transportation for students who receive special education services, staff continue to remain hypervigilant about ensuring that all special education students whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) includes the related service of transportation receives it and that all other students with disabilities who have an IEP or other plans are supported as they travel to and from school each day. The Executive Director of Special Education is in constant coordination with the Office of Student Transportation staff to be sure all needs in this area are covered.

Athletics Transportation
The process for coordinating transportation for extracurricular athletics is unchanged and schools will continue to use the transportation service providers that serve their school. The Coordinator of Athletics is in constant coordination with the Office of Student Transportation staff to ensure coverage in this area.

Additionally, school administrators are guiding staff that athletic teams, clubs, and other extracurricular activities should not take advantage of the additional time before school to hold extended practices or meetings. If a group historically has met before school for a particular amount of time, they may still do so, but the duration should not be extended due to the later school start time.

There may be times when it may be advantageous for an athletic team to practice before school to maximize facility usage due to hourly limitations, weather, heat index issues, and recreation and parks activities in the afternoon and evening. This will only be done on a temporary (as needed) basis and at the discretion of the principal and in consultation with School Management and Instructional Leadership staff. School staff will be reminded of the intent and health benefits of the change in school start times when making these decisions.

What levels of funding will be needed to go 10% above the current contracts with Zum and Tip Top? How many vehicles is 10% more?
To add 10% more buses as allowed in the contracts with Zum and Tip Top, that would result in a total of 28 more buses at a cost of approximately $2.75 million. These buses would only serve the areas of the county designated for Zum and Tip Top.

All other transportation contracts do not allow for this type of increase.

How will alternative vehicles be used?
Our contract with Zum allows us to leverage up to 50 vehicles that do not require the driver to hold a Commercial Driver's License. There are certain situations in which these vehicles could be utilized such as transporting non-public students, displaced students, or picking up students in transportation areas where there is an unexpected bus shortage. These vehicles can help supplement transportation and increase efficiencies. During a driver shortage, for example, a bus that only picks up a few students could be replaced with a smaller vehicle, freeing up the larger bus to do a full run.

In alignment with Policy 5200, these vehicles may only be used to serve students who are eligible to receive bus transportation.

The Annotated Code of Maryland, Education Article §7-801 allows a county board to provide transportation to and from schools using an alternative vehicle other than a school bus when a school bus cannot reasonably be provided. The statute lists the categories of students who may be transported using an alternative vehicle. These categories are:

1. Pre-school age students;
2. Students with disabilities;
3. Homeless youth;
4. Children in foster care;
5. Students without access to school buses;
6. Students placed by the school system in a nonpublic school; or,
7. Students in dual enrollments, work programs, or other educational programs based off the school campus.

Given the plan by the Howard County Public School System's Office of Student Transportation to use the alternative school vehicles for students as expressly allowed by the §7-801 of the Education Article, there will not be a need to change the Board of Education of Howard County transportation policy.

How will HCPSS ensure the safe arrival of students to and from school during severe, inclement weather, poor air quality days or when there is a threat of severe weather?
The safe arrival and dismissal of students to and from school is paramount and this

requires the collaborative effort of families, county agencies, and the school system. The HCPSS Office of Student Transportation regularly coordinates with the Chief Operating Officer to evaluate weather conditions to determine if there is a likelihood that weather will have an impact on student safety as students travel to and from school. Students traveling to and from school—whether by bus, car, riding a bike, or walking—are always considered when making weather-related decisions. It is common to delay the start of school opening or dismissal to account for inclement weather.

Additionally, we encourage parents, guardians, and family members to stay abreast of weather and air quality issues to ensure the safety and conduct of their children from the time they leave home until they board the school bus or enter school property and from the time they leave the school bus or exit school property at the end of the day.

A reminder that prior to the expansion of non-transportation areas in Policy 5200, over 14,000 HCPSS students who reside in existing non-transportation areas have been getting to and from school in inclement weather. Policy 5200 added an additional 3,500 students to the original 14,000 students. These students have always been considered when inclement weather is likely.

There was a question during the last Board report about transporting all students during inclement weather. This would not be possible as there are over 17,000 students who live in non-transportation areas.

How will the changes in transportation affect students who participate in extracurricular/afterschool activities?
Historically, HCPSS has not provided transportation for students who stay after school for extracurricular activities. Students who participate in these activities do so voluntarily with the understanding that transportation is not provided from school to home. This is not a shift from prior years.

Why is an out-of-state, for-profit company allowed to advertise on school property? Is this available to local bus contractors as well?
All bus contractors are welcome to advertise open positions to fill vacancies for HCPSS transportation on HCPSS school property. In addition to contractors advertising vacancies, HCPSS has assisted with advertising, including parking a school bus on Route 108 last summer and at school locations to increase awareness of vacancies as well as hosting job fairs with all contractors invited to recruit and hire drivers. It is in the best interest of both HCPSS and bus contractors to fill all positions.

During the July 13, 2023 Board of Education meeting, the Superintendent said that if changes need to be made, he would not have to wait for the 60-day review and has the authority to make changes as soon as the first week of school. During the same meeting, the Office of Student Transportation said they need three months to make changes. Is there a discrepancy in these responses?
The three months mentioned by the Director of Student Transportation referred to the

time it would take if Policy 5200 were changed in whole. One-offs and minimal adjustments may be made at any time and will be addressed as issues arise during the school year.

Prekindergarten Transportation
Prekindergarten begins on Thursday, August 31, 2023 and there are no significant changes this school year for the transportation of prekindergarten students beyond the policy change in non-transportation distance to 1 mile.

SAFETY & SECURITY

Will there be more Howard County EMS and police patrolling during times when students are traveling to and from school?
The Howard County Police Department will have an increased presence around schools when the new school year begins. Their H.A.S.T.E. (Helping Arriving Students Through Enforcement) program has officers focused on enforcing traffic laws in school areas.

Additionally, while School Resource Officers (SROs) are assigned to high schools, they are often in close proximity to middle and elementary schools to assist as needed.

Community members can always call the HCPD non-emergency number 410-313-2200 for assistance or 911 in an emergency. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) will also continue to respond as needed through the activation of the 911 system.

How will walking areas be assessed for on-going safety? Which public entities are responsible for this and are they aware of the increased walking areas? Who should families contact when concerns arise?
Several entities oversee the walkways, including HCPSS, Columbia Association, the Howard County Government and Howard County Recreation and Parks.

Per Policy 5200 Implementation Procedures, Section IV. Resources and Reviews, section B. states:

> The following resources will be used, as appropriate, to help determine suitable pathways, walkways, school bus stops, suitable crossings, bus turnarounds, school bus routes, etc.
>
> 1. Howard County Police Department
> 2. Howard County Department of Public Works Traffic Engineering Division
> 3. Howard County Office of Transportation
> 4. Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks
> 5. Columbia Association
> 6. Other state or county agencies

Per Policy 5200 item B under section IV. Responsibilities, parents also play a role in the safety of their students when traveling to and from school:

> *Parents will ensure the safety and conduct of their children from the time they leave home until they board the school bus or enter school property and from the time they leave the school bus or exit school property at the end of the day.*

I met with representatives from Columbia Association to discuss the current walking paths in Columbia. The purpose of the meeting was to confirm understanding of the school start times initiative and ensure walking paths were properly maintained for safe travel for students and families. Additionally, Columbia Association will be prioritizing clearing the pathways students use to travel to school on days when there has been inclement weather.

If students or families encounter conditions on walking routes that pose a hazard, they should report them to the HCPSS Office of Student Transportation so staff can contact the appropriate entity to remedy the situation. Should paths or routes become unsafe for a longer term, students will be provided with transportation until the route once again is deemed safe.

Questions related to registered sex offenders in Howard County
Several questions have been submitted related to registered sex offenders in Howard County and ways to keep students safe as they travel to and from school.

We have had several thousand students using walking paths, sidewalks and roadways to travel to and from school each day for many years. If anybody becomes suspicious of illegal or unsafe behavior occurring near students as they travel to and from school, they should contact police immediately. Additionally, we will continue to encourage students to talk with a trusted adult at their school if they are aware of suspicious activity so we may help coordinate assistance.

This process also requires the collaboration with families who ensure the safety of their children as they travel to and from school and bus stops.

In the event of a threat or a lockdown while students are traveling to and from school, how will schools communicate with students, parents, etc.?
Our commitment is to do everything we can to ensure that our children and staff are provided a safe, healthy, and supportive environment. We constantly encourage community members, students and staff to report suspicious activity or any concerns to school administrators and/or staff as soon as possible.

When there is an incident during school, HCPSS will continue to follow standard procedures, which include informing students, staff and families as soon as possible.

In any developing situation, the primary focus is to first ensure the safety of all students and staff and communicate with any relevant law enforcement agencies. Notification to families is crucial and will be done as soon as staff are able.

Using email and text alerts, HCPSS News keeps parents/guardians, staff, and community members up to date on news and events, including emergency information.

What is the status of filling new crossing guard vacancies? Which schools will these crossing guards monitor? What happens if these roles do not get filled?
The Howard County Police Department (HCPD) determines where crossing guards are placed and is actively hiring to fill these roles. At the beginning of this hiring process, their online job posting listed the following schools where crossing guard positions were available.
Ducketts Lane Elem (Elkridge)
Bellows Spring Elem (Ellicott City)
Elkridge Landing Middle (Elkridge)
Elkridge Elementary (Elkridge)
Mayfield Woods Middle (Elkridge)
Thomas Viaduct Middle (Hanover)
Hanover Hills Elementary (Hanover)
Atholton Elementary (Columbia)
Clarksville Elementary (Clarksville)
Guilford Elementary (Columbia)
Thunder Hill Elementary (Columbia)

In addition to those schools, HCPD asked that the following schools also share the position openings with their community, which they all did:

Phelps Luck Elementary
Burleigh Manor Middle
Hollifield Station Elementary
Jeffers Hill Elementary
Swansfield Elementary

If posts cannot be covered by current HCPD staff at the start of the school year, police officers, auxiliary police officers, and cadets will be dispatched to handle any vacant crossing posts on a daily basis.

I am grateful for the 11 total additional crossing guards being hired to help facilitate students safely traveling to and from school so some of these schools may no longer be listed as a job opening. Additionally, it is important to note that one guard may serve multiple schools. We are supporting police by helping communicate the openings as it is often community members that serve as crossing guards for their nearby school.

Concerns with speeding cars
Community members have expressed concerns with their child walking to school in neighborhoods where too many people drive above the speed limit.

Whether students are walking to and from school or a bus stop, we strongly encourage

communities to make police aware when there are ongoing concerns with speeding drivers or other issues of safety within a neighborhood. This is a concern for all students – those who live in an area that qualifies for bus transportation and those who do not - and something our school staff will remain diligent of and contact the appropriate authorities when they witness dangerous driving or other unsafe acts.

STUDENT SUPPORTS

Helping Students Adjust to Changes in Schedules and Transportation
The start of every school year requires a transition period for students, staff and families. We understand that many students have new considerations during their commute to and from school, whether that is transitioning from a bus rider to a walker, being part of a new bus route, having a new start time to school, or transitioning from fifth grade to sixth grade or from eighth grade to ninth grade.

School staff will continue to extend grace to students who may be late to school due to transitioning to a new transportation medium or schedule and communicate with families to ensure students are arriving to school on time. I am communicating to school administrators that I expect that students who are merely minutes late to school will not be marked as tardy for the first two weeks.

Will drop-off and pick-up procedures be adjusted if they result in major delays?
The HCPSS Division of School Management and Instructional Leadership is working with every school principal to evaluate their bus and car loop procedures to ensure all arrival and dismissal processes are safe and efficient. School administrators sent surveys to the community in the spring and are using the collective feedback to inform and refine the arrival and dismissal process. Additionally, staff from central office and the County are assisting schools as needed through this process. Principals will continue to evaluate processes for improvement at each school as students return at the start of the school year and adjustments will be made in collaboration with the offices of School Management and Instructional Leadership and Safety and Security.

How will you monitor and mitigate the mental health of the students who are adjusting to the change in walking to and from school each day?
School administrators will continue to work closely with teachers, pupil personnel workers, social workers, school nurses, liaisons, school counselors and other staff to identify and support students experiencing mental and physical health needs for any reason. Additionally, teachers can follow their school's Student Support Team referral process when they have concerns about a student. Parents/guardians should reach out to their student's school administrator or counselor to share concerns and access resources to help support these needs.

How will you support low-income students who may lack adequate gear to handle the elements while walking to and from school?
School administrators will continue to work closely with their dedicated Student Support Teams comprised of pupil personnel workers, social workers, school nurses, liaisons, school counselors and other staff to identify and support students who have financial needs and be sure they have what they need so they are able to thrive at school.

How will students with accommodations (504/IEP plans) who are not eligible for transportation be supported to ensure they are prepared for their commute?
Students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a Section 504 plan that includes transportation automatically receive transportation regardless of whether they reside in a non-transportation area. When students have IEP/504 plans that require accommodations on the bus, the school team will continue to work with bus teams to implement those accommodations.

Students who do not receive transportation as part of their individual plan will continue to travel by the best method as determined by their parent/guardian.

Preparing School Principals
Staff from the Division of School Management and Instructional Leadership (SMIL) worked with individual schools throughout the spring and summer months to ensure school leaders solicited feedback and suggestions from students, staff, and families in developing their plans for bus loops, student drop off and pick up areas, and non-transportation areas. SMIL team members also visited numerous schools to troubleshoot anticipated challenges in collaboration with administrators and representatives from the Office of Student Transportation.

Dr. Anissa Dennis and her team facilitated a training session for principals on August 1, 2023. During this training, Dr. Dennis, Mr. Nevin, and SMIL team members reviewed the information provided in the Board memo sent on July 7, 2023 and presented Transportation Updates for Administrators. Each school was instructed to send an email to students, staff, and families that provided information related to traveling to and from school this year. Principals were also reminded to continue communicating with students, staff, and families in the upcoming weeks regarding any updates or changes that are being made regarding drop off and pick up locations and procedures along with staff parking and supervision responsibilities.

In addition, SMIL shared a Google form survey with schools that could be provided to parents, guardians, and community members to register concerns/complaints that cannot be addressed at the school level and require a school system response.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Regular and transparent communication around this topic with all HCPSS stakeholders remains a priority and there are several processes currently occurring and being planned between now and the beginning of the school year to keep students, staff, families and all stakeholders informed.

System Communications
August 10, 2023 – This Board Memo will be posted online and shared as part of a community update that informs the community of the decision to adhere strictly to the non-transportation distances set forth in Policy 5200

August 10-11, 2023 – The online Frequently Asked Questions will be updated with content from this Board Memo.

Week of August 14, 2023 – A community update will be shared with families providing information on how to find their school's start and end time, accessing the bus locator tool, and where to find online FAQs and other resources related to student transportation.

Week of August 21, 2023 – All updated information and final reminders will be provided to families and staff to ensure they are ready for the first day of school on August 28, 2023.

Additionally, Office of Communications staff will work with staff from the Division of School Management and Instructional Leadership and school administrators to identify and support the ongoing communications needs that exist in school communities.

School Communications
August 10, 2023 – Schools will have shared a message with their communities containing information for traveling to school this school year. This message was translated into Spanish, Korean, and Chinese and includes:

- Their school's start and end times,
- Information related to their school's pick up and drop off procedures,
- Instructions for accessing the Bus Locator tool,
- Instructions and resources for families that will be driving or walking their child to school, and
- Directions on where to find more information.

Week of August 14, 2023 – The Office of Student Transportation and school administrators are communicating with the families of the 259 students who have had transportation reinstated as a result of the decision detailed in this Board memo.

Week of August 14, 2023 – Schools will begin displaying their school's start and end time on their school's digital marquee located near the entrance of school property.

Additionally, school front office staff will be participating in training next week with the Office of Student Transportation on how to best support their communities with any transportation concerns that arise once students return.

Families at the fifty schools that receive transportation by Zum Services will receive information on how to use Zum's app to track their child's bus.

School Start Times by County

County	ES	MS	HS
Howard	**8:40 a.m. & 9:15 a.m.**	**8:00 a.m. & 8:40 a.m.**	**8:00 a.m.**
Allegany	8:00-8:45 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:40 a.m.
Anne Arundel	8 a.m.	9:15 a.m.	8:30 a.m.
Baltimore City	7:30-9:15 a.m.	7:30-9:15 a.m.	7:30-9 a.m.
Baltimore County	8:20-9:30 a.m.	7-8:35 a.m.	7:25-7:45 a.m.
Calvert	8:45-9:25 a.m.	7:50 a.m.	7:15 a.m.
Caroline	9:05 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:40 a.m.
Carroll	7:45-9:30 a.m.	8:25-8:35 a.m.	7:30 a.m.
Cecil	8:55-9:00 a.m.	7:35-7:45 a.m.	7:35 a.m.
Charles	8:15-9:30 a.m.	7:30-8:50 a.m.	7:25-8:05 a.m.
Dorchester	8:10-8:25 a.m.	7:35-7:50 a.m.	7:40 a.m.
Frederick	9 a.m.	8 a.m.	7:30 a.m.
Garrett	8:00 a.m.	8:30 a.m.	8:25 a.m.
Harford	9 a.m.	8:15 a.m.	7:30 a.m.
Kent	9:15 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:25 a.m.
Montgomery	9-9:25 a.m.	8:15 a.m.	7:45 a.m.
Prince George's	7:30-9:30 a.m.	7:45-9:30 a.m.	7:45-9:30 a.m.
Queen Anne's	7:45-9:15 a.m.	7:30-8:58 a.m.	7:35-8 a.m.
St. Mary's	8:00-9:15 a.m.	7:00-7:30 a.m.	7:30-7:45 a.m.
Somerset	8:55 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:30 a.m.
Talbot	8:00-9:00 a.m.	8:00 a.m.	7:45 a.m.
Washington	7:05-8:45 a.m.	7:05-8:25 a.m.	8:15-8:20 a.m.
Wicomico	8:15-9:15 a.m.	7:45 a.m.	7:45 a.m.
Worcester	7:35-8:50 a.m.	7:35-8 a.m.	8:00 a.m.

1. Many Baltimore City schools are ES/MS combined. 93 Baltimore City Schools' start times changed for the 2022-2023 school year
2. PG County: Only two of the 23 traditional high schools start at 9:30; one starts at 9; the remainder start between 7:45 and 8:30

2023-2024 Non-Transportation Areas by County

COUNTY	Prek & K Distance	Elementary School Distance	Middle School Distance	High School Distance	Date Updated
Howard	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	2.0 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Allegany	1 Mile(s)	1 Mile(s)	1.5Mile(s)	1.5Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Anne Arundel	.5 Miles	1 Mile	1.5 Miles	1.5 Miles	5/4/2023
Baltimore City	1 Mile(s)	1 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Baltimore County	1 Mile(s)	1 Mile(s)	1.25 Mile(s)	1.75 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Calvert	0.5 Mile(s)	0.5 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Caroline	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Carroll	0 Mile(s)	0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Cecil	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Charles	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile	1.0 mile	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Dorchester	0 Mile(s)	0 Mile(s)	0 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Frederick	1.25 Mile(s)	1.25 Mile(s)	1.75 Mile(s)	1.75 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Garrett	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Harford	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Kent	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Montgomery	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	2.0 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Prince George's	1.5 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	2.0 Mile(s)	2.0 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Queen Anne's	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.5Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
St Mary's	.5 Mile(s)	.5 Mile(s)	1 Mile(s)	1 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Somerset	0 Mile(s)	1 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	
Talbot	.5 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	
Washington	1 Mile(s)	1 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	1.5 Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Wicomico	1 Mile(s)	1 Mile(s)	1.5Mile(s)	1.5Mile(s)	5/4/2023
Worcester	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	1.0 Mile(s)	5/4/2023