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Idaho School Transportation Best Practices

The purpose of providing this list of “best practices,” is to encourage School Districts, and Charter Schools to identify ways to save funds, improve management, increase efficiency and effectiveness, and get all Districts, and Charter Schools statewide providing the best quality service with consistent comparisons between District, Charter School and Contract operations; thus reducing State School Transportation Costs.

PLANNING:

1. Student Transportation should be coordinated within the context of District, Charter School and Community budgeting and long-term planning.

Student transportation staff should be involved in major decisions that will affect student transportation operations. School districts, and charter schools administrative and student transportation personnel should work cooperatively in identifying the district’s and charter school’s student transportation needs and cooperatively prioritize these needs within the context of educational importance, budget constraints, and cost effectiveness.

In accordance to § 33-1502, Idaho Code, the local Board of Trustees shall annually (August) approve non-transportation zones and student transportation routes. In order for local Boards of Trustees to make effective and appropriate student transportation routing decisions, factual information must be provided. Therefore, student transportation staff should provide the public and the Board with factual information related to specific routing configurations and the financial impacts of those specific routing configurations, such as staggered school start times (tiering), school locations (including magnet, exceptional student program, and alternative schools), courtesy bus stops, and school choice programs.

Also, school location can have a significant effect on district student transportation costs. Therefore, boundary planning and new school planning should include both community and student transportation staff input. Failure to involve the community and student transportation personnel in the decision-making process can be very costly and negatively affect district and charter school transportation for many years.

2. School Districts and Charter Schools should plan and prepare to provide accurate and timely rider counts and bus mileage reports to the Idaho State Department of Education as part of the Idaho Student Transportation Support Program.

The main source of transportation funds for most Idaho school districts and charter schools is the Idaho Student Transportation Support Program (§ 33-1006, Idaho Code). Of all “approved” student transportation costs in the state are paid from general fund monies, based primarily on overall district mileage reports. Consequently, districts should plan for and implement appropriate school bus mileage tracking mechanisms which easily reconcile to the Idaho Student Transportation Claim Form.

In an effort to generate fiscal responsibility at the local level, legislators adjusted Idaho’s Student Transportation Funding Program by implementing (fiscal year 2004) a funding cap on school districts and charter schools that exceed both statewide average cost-per-rider and statewide average cost-per-mile. As a result, school districts and charter schools are required to determine the number of students riding their buses through sample counts conducted during week-long count periods annually determined by the State Department of Education. The student rider counts are then reported to the Idaho State Department of Education.

Because ridership counts and mileage reports ultimately determine the statewide “capping threshold” and the level of transportation funding to some school districts and charter schools, it is important for this information to be accurate. Ridership records and mileage reports are reviewed by state student transportation specialists on a periodic basis and, if the district cannot justify its claims for state transportation funds, funds may be taken away from the district. Student ridership counts and annual school bus mileage reports used in this program are also useful to district staff in establishing trend lines for the prediction of district student transportation needs.

The State Department of Education Division of School Transportation recommend that local transportation departments evaluate routes and stops where courtesy riders are picked up to determine whether such routes and stops are needed or can be eliminated. If the district chooses to continue transporting some or all of its courtesy riders, it should clarify its existing policy to specify the circumstances under which it will do so and identify factors beyond state-established criteria that it will consider in designating unsafe walking conditions (Safety Busing). District-specific criteria for unsafe walking conditions should also be used to determine whether the district should increase its policy on the distance between bus stops.

Since courtesy bus riders are considered “ineligible” for school transportation services reimbursement from the state general fund, it is imperative that school districts and charter schools accurately track eligible and ineligible ridership and appropriately adjust the district’s annual school transportation reimbursement claim.

3. School Districts and Charter Schools should plan, prepare, review, and establish safe bus routes and bus stops prerequisite to providing cost-efficient student transportation services for all students who qualify for transportation.

Routing is probably the single most important factor in establishing an effective, cost-efficient, and safe district student transportation system. Efficient bus routes incorporate features such as reasonably high average bus occupancy and reasonably low cost-per-rider and cost-per-mile. Also, having fewer bus stops that serve larger numbers of students, avoiding transporting students who could safely walk to school and are ineligible for state transportation funding (“safety busing” or “courtesy busing”), using school starting and ending times that allow individual buses to have separate bus runs for multiple schools or grade levels (“tiered routing”), and providing sufficient time between school starting and ending times that allow buses to get from the end of one bus run to the beginning of another. However, rural school districts and charter schools may not be able to effectively implement “tiered routing” and will transport all grade levels on one route in an effort to maximize routing efficiencies.

Where hazardous walking conditions exist, school districts and charter schools should provide crossing guards and work with governmental agencies in reducing speed limits, installing sidewalks, and other safety measures.

Larger school districts and charter schools with complex routes may need the assistance of computerized routing systems to design cost efficient bus routes, while smaller districts can develop efficient routes manually.

Planning Summary:

- Transportation staff and/or Contractor should be involved in major decisions that will affect transportation operations.
- Needs and priorities together with cost-saving options should be presented to school board and public during their budget process, along with factual information needed to assist the school board in making appropriate decisions.
- Provide the School Board and Public, information on the financial impact of certain decisions, such as those involving staggered school start times and school choice programs.
- Transportation staff should be involved in the community and school planning processes as related to community growth and need for new schools.
- Failure to be involved through input and suggestions could greatly impact transportation costs and negatively affect the district for several years.

- Consult with local government agencies and community planners to identify areas of impact on school transportation, including but not limited to:
 - Existing District/Charter land holdings
 - District/Charter boundary lines
 - Residential construction
 - Road improvements
 - Sidewalk construction
 - County growth patterns
 - Length & time of current bus runs
 - Other community developments associated with transportation needs.
- Transportation staff should implement tracking mechanisms that will ensure accurate student rider counts and daily school bus mileage necessary for reconciling to the annual Student Transportation Claim Form.
- Transportation staff should annually, prior to the end of the traditional school year, review routing configurations within the context of educational importance, budget constraints, and cost effectiveness.
- Transportation staff should evaluate all safety busing sites for environmental and hazardous condition changes no less than every three years.

ORGANIZATION:

4. **The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district's student transportation operation should minimize administrative layers and processes.**

School districts and charter schools should maximize available funds in order to adequately support their primary mission, educating students. Lean administrative and managerial functions are common in well-run school districts and charter schools. Making the most effective use of scarce resources allocated for administrative services requires skill and insight, since there is no one right way to organize and staff the transportation operation at the local level. However, the organizational structure of the transportation function should be relatively flat with appropriate spans of control. Such a structure will result in minimized administrative and managerial costs while providing sufficient managerial controls to ensure operations are properly carried out. Staffing needs to be to the level by which needed work (needs assessment) is accomplished in an economical and efficient manner. School districts and charter schools should avoid secondary levels of administration to oversee the student transportation operation. Districts should hire capable and competent personnel or provide necessary and ongoing training at the lowest level, at the student transportation facility. It is expected in smaller districts that smaller staff sizes require staff to individually handle multiple areas of responsibility, such as supervising, repairing buses, ordering parts and

supplies, dispatching, etc. Rural or small school districts and charter schools should explore the potential for cooperative service mechanisms between neighboring school districts and charter schools or other government service agencies. For example, sharing repair or fueling facilities, sharing administrative functions, or sharing transportation services for common field trips are a few possibilities worthy of consideration.

STAFFING:

5. School Districts and Charter Schools should maintain an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and should provide support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop skills.

Vehicle maintenance operations have to strike a balance of having enough trained staff to properly maintain vehicles while not having excessive staff, which increases costs and reduces operational efficiency. The number of vehicle maintenance personnel needed can vary depending on factors such as the number of different types of buses being maintained, whether vehicle maintenance maintains the district's services fleet (cars, trucks, and other on-road vehicles), and whether they maintain other district equipment such as lawn mowers and tractors. In addition to employing adequate maintenance staff, districts need to invest resources into updating the skills of their vehicle maintenance staff to improve vehicle maintenance efficiency. Such resources include the district providing training opportunities for staff and incentive pay for those who achieve certification in applicable work areas.

6. School Districts and Charter Schools should effectively and efficiently recruit and retain school bus drivers and bus attendants.

A stable workforce reduces costs and minimizes the disruption of essential district services. However, for most school districts and charter schools job turnover among bus drivers and attendants is generally high compared to that of other classes of employees. Contributing to this high turnover is the fact that, unlike many other district employees, bus drivers and attendants are generally part-time employees who must report to work early in the morning and finish late in the day. In addition bus drivers face many other challenges that make their jobs particularly difficult and stressful, such as trying to drive safely while maintaining discipline on a bus. Because of the relatively high rates of turnover among bus drivers and attendants, school districts and charter schools need to have an effective system for recruiting and retraining these individuals. Job turnover can be addressed through retention and recruitment. Retention is a preferred way to maintain the staffing levels through reduction in job turnover. Districts/charters need to collect data to determine what it will take to keep drivers and attendants working and performing well for them.

The State Department of Education Division of Student Transportation recommends that school districts and charter schools compile information on factors contributing to driver turnover from employee exit interviews. Districts/Charters can use the information to develop strategies to address bus driver turnover.

Once the district/charter determines why the drivers and attendants want to work for them, they can put together a combination of salary, benefits, and incentives (both financial and non-financial) that will encourage good workers to keep working for the district/charter yet not cause financial difficulties for the district/charter. As there generally will be some turnover in drivers and attendants each year, the district/charter needs to be prepared to efficiently and effectively recruit high quality drivers and attendants. These efforts include collecting data on wages offered by alternative local employers (both public and private sectors) and knowing the best methods to put their recruiting message to potential drivers and attendants.

7. The School District or Charter School should train, supervise, and assist bus drivers to enable them to meet bus-driving standards and maintain acceptable student discipline on the bus.

To effectively and efficiently carry out their duties, school district or charter school employees must be aware of the scope of their responsibilities, have the necessary skills to carry out those responsibilities, and understand performance expectations. Thus, school districts and charter schools need to effectively train, supervise, and assist employees in the performance of their duties. School districts and charter schools generally offer commercial driver license training (a commercial driver license is required to drive a school bus) in order to successfully recruit bus drivers. Management also has responsibilities to supervise its drivers to ensure that necessary rules and regulations are followed with buses being safely operated. Supervision responsibilities include direct observation of bus handling, assisting drivers with student bus discipline problems, administering drug and alcohol tests, and enforcement of driving policies. *Standards for Idaho School Buses and Operations* (SISBO) delineate specific training (pre-service and in-service) and observation requirements for school bus drivers and should be adhered to. Management can improve job performance by providing in-service training and resolving drivers' job-related problems.

VEHICLE ACQUIATION AND MAINTENANCE:

8. The School District or Charter School should have a process in place that ensures sufficient vehicles are acquired economically and that an adequate number of buses are available to meet the district's current and futures needs.

School buses and other vehicles are an expensive but necessary investment for most school districts and charter schools. Therefore, school districts and charter schools need to have systems in place to ensure that decisions to purchase, maintain, and sell vehicles meet the district's needs in the most economical way. These decisions must consider a variety of factors. For instance, the need for buses to transport students is a given for districts, but it is important to buy the right type of buses at the right time. In addition, it is generally more economical to operate larger buses than smaller ones, so long as a high occupancy level can be maintained. Districts/charters should buy the vehicles through economical methods such as cooperative bidding (see § 33-601, Idaho Code). Once vehicles are purchased and inspected, districts should track vehicle maintenance costs and age to determine when the optimal time is to remove and replace the vehicle (assuming the need for the vehicle still exists). Districts/charters should minimize the number of spare buses they retain to avoid tying up funds through excess inventory. Vehicles removed from service should be processed so that the district recovers the maximum value possible for the disposal of the vehicle, such as fixing minor cosmetic flaws to encourage higher bids at auctions.

9. **The School District or Charter School should provide timely routine servicing for buses (see § 33-1506, Idaho Code, and *Standards for Idaho School Buses and Operations – SISBO*) and other district vehicles, as well as prompt response for breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies.**

Good stewardship of district/charter resources dictates district vehicles should be properly maintained to operate properly and maximize their value. District/charter vehicle maintenance operations can be divided into two types: those that service just buses and those that service buses and some or all other district/charter vehicles. No matter what type of vehicle maintenance operation is used, it is important that the transportation department tracks vehicle maintenance for all district on-road vehicles (school buses, maintenance vehicles, service vehicles 15-passenger vans, and over-the-road coaches) to ensure that timely servicing is performed. Accurate tracking can help the district/charter make appropriate decisions on whether to make complex or expensive repairs on older vehicles, when to retire older vehicles or when to replace older vehicles. The servicing of district/charter vehicles does not have to be accomplished in district/charter-owned facilities (especially if there is lack of facilities and manpower to do so) but can be done on an outsourced basis; however, the district/charter is responsible to ensure quality of service at a reasonable and efficient cost and in a timely manner. It is also important that accurate records be maintained and that all required maintenance forms be used (see § 33-1506, Idaho Code; IDAPA 08.02.02.150-210, and *Standards for Idaho School Buses and Operations – SISBO*). The State of Idaho reimburses school districts and charter schools approximately 85% of their maintenance costs; therefore, accurate record keeping is imperative.

10. The School District or Charter School should ensure that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel (see § 33-601, Idaho Code).

School districts and charter schools need effective systems that ensure that fuel is purchased at the lowest possible cost, prevent unauthorized use of fuel, and that fueling stations are accessible to vehicles. Cost-effective purchases of fuel generally occur when the district/charter and other large users of fuel (such as neighboring school districts, charter schools, and local governments) pool their fuel purchases into a large bid. Part of the bid should include timely deliveries of fuel to district/charter or joint-use fueling stations. To ensure that the fuel stations have sufficient fuel for district/charter operations, districts/charters must monitor fuel disbursements to prevent theft and know when to reorder fuel supplies. Large districts should be able to justify using automated fueling systems that are designed specifically to prevent unauthorized fuel disbursements and monitor fuel tank levels as well as log the amount of fuel used by individual vehicles. Smaller school districts and charter schools must track fuel use by individual vehicles. Leaking fuel tanks can be a major cost for the district/charter. Failure to promptly deal with fuel leaks found either through automated fueling systems or during inspections by governmental environmental agencies can result in large district/charter costs to clean up ground contamination (a non-reimbursable expense) especially if the contamination is underground and in the groundwater. The Idaho State Department of Education Division of School Transportation recommends pooling fueling resources whenever possible to maximize efficiency and minimize liability risk. The State of Idaho reimburses school districts and charter schools approximately 85% of their fuel costs for all reimbursable miles traveled; therefore, accurate record keeping is imperative.

11. The School District or Charter School should ensure that maintenance facilities are properly maintained, appropriately secure, and conveniently located.

If uncontrolled, vehicle maintenance costs can represent a significant expense to school districts and charter schools and, thus, should be effectively managed. To efficiently maintain vehicles and reduce maintenance-related costs, the district must have maintenance facilities that are appropriately situated within the district so as to minimize distances district vehicles have to travel for servicing yet have access to vehicle parts houses and delivery services. Service areas should be equipped with parts rooms, administrative areas, specialized tools, and covered and hard surfaced working areas so that technicians can concentrate on their assigned jobs rather be distracted, prevented from work due to weather, lack of tools, etc. The maintenance facilities will generate hazardous wastes such as antifreeze, which need to be stored and properly disposed of. In general, district/charter vehicles should be

parked in secure compounds at the end of the working day to reduce transportation costs for the district/charter. The only time that vehicles should be allowed to be taken home is if it can be shown to be in the district/charter's best financial interests to allow certain vehicles to be taken home (during or following the workday). One example of this exception is when it is cheaper for the school district or charter school to allow a bus driver to take a bus and park it at home instead of taking it to a distant bus compound. It is also appropriate for district/charter employees in an on-call status (such as district/charter facility staff) to park vehicles at their homes instead of a district compound if the drivers are frequently responding to calls after normal working hours involving the transport of materials not easily transported in personal passenger vehicles (such as heavy welding equipment or sheets of plywood).

12. The School District or Charter School should maintain an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balance the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.

Minimizing the amount of time vehicles spend out of service being maintained minimizes disruptions to district/charter services and reduces the number of vehicles required to support the district/charter's transportation needs. Thus, keeping vehicles on the road in good repair saves the district/charter money. Several factors affect vehicle maintenance time and costs. For instance, insufficient parts inventories can result in higher maintenance downtime for buses and the need to maintain extra spare buses. Conversely, excessive parts inventories can cost the district/charter needed funds that can be used to meet other district transportation needs. Ideally, districts and charters should have the minimum number of parts and supplies necessary to efficiently operate the fleet. Strategies for achieving this goal include standardizing engines, electronic components, and bodies and the using just-in-time inventories. However, districts and charters should not be lured into standardizing bus model purchases which can over time circumvent competitive bidding and create excessive bus purchase costs disproportionate to multiple bus component inventory costs. Districts/charters should also recognize that many bus engines and other components are somewhat generic to all bus models, if correctly bid.

Parts and supplies that are purchased also need to be secured to safeguard district assets, using management tools such as restrictions on who can be in parts rooms, maintaining inventory tracking systems, and periodically conducting part inventory audits. Districts and charters also need to make sure that they fully use the warranties provided by bus manufacturers, thus avoiding paying for repairs and parts that are covered by warranty.

OPERATIONS, MANAGEMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

- 13. The School District or Charter School should ensure that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accordance with established routines, and any unexpected contingencies affecting vehicle operations are handled safely and promptly.**

School districts and charter schools should use up-to-date procedures, coupled with appropriate policies, to ensure that activities are carried out in an efficient and effective manner and that districts/charters are in compliance with federal and state laws. Written procedures should serve as a district/charter's institutional memory for key processes and as such help to minimize disruption to essential services and reduce the need for costly training and assistance due to staff turnover, a particularly important issue to the transportation function. Therefore, districts/charters should develop effective procedures to handle circumstances that prevent normal bus operations. District or charter policies and procedures should include vehicle breakdowns, driver absences, bus overcrowding, and excessive ride times. While the district or charter needs to minimize these occurrences, they also need effective procedures to follow when these situations occur. To recover costs of non-reimbursable field trips, districts/charters should have a policy to charge schools 100% of all transportation costs for non-reimbursable field/activity trips.

- 14. The School District or Charter School should provide efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.**

School districts and charter schools are required by law to provide specialized transportation services to certain students with disabilities. When transportation service is determined necessary subsequent to a student's IEP (Individual Education Program), the service can be very costly to a district/charter and the state. Many IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) students can ride on regular buses with no assistance or equipment. However, not all IDEA students are entitled to transportation services. Some disabilities do not require special transportation as a related service, while other disabilities may require accommodations, e.g., specially equipped buses that lift a student and wheelchair into the bus, along with securement devices when appropriate.

To ensure compliance with law while controlling costs, school districts and charter schools need effective systems for determining IDEA students' need for special transportation, i.e., the IEP. As the need for special transportation is determined in meetings between teachers, parents, transportation personnel, and other stakeholders, districts and charters need policies that clearly outline the circumstances that require special transportation. District/charter policies

should also identify circumstances in which alternative transportation modes, such as paying parents (in-lieu) to drive children who need special supervision.

Finally, districts/charters should seek to recover Medicaid reimbursement for IEP transportation whenever possible, as this federal program will reimburse school districts and charter schools for transporting Medicaid-eligible students on certain approved bus runs. It is rare for the cost to complete Medicaid paperwork to exceed the amount of the reimbursement. Every Medicaid dollar coming into the district/charter frees up a general fund dollar for another district/charter need. Because the State of Idaho reimburses school districts and charter schools approximately 85% of IEP transportation costs, accurate mileage and Medicaid reimbursement record keeping is imperative.

15. The School District or Charter School should ensure that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns.

No matter how competent bus drivers are and how well buses are maintained, accidents and breakdowns occur. Districts and charters need written procedures to guide employees when these situations occur to ensure that activities are carried out in a safe, efficient and effective manner. It is imperative that the proper officials are notified in a timely manner (within fifteen days) and that federal and state laws are adhered to subsequent to any accident.

16. The School District or Charter School should ensure that appropriate student behavior is maintained on the bus with students being held accountable for financial consequences of misbehavior related to transportation.

Inappropriate student behavior on school buses can distract bus drivers from their responsibility to drive their buses safely and can potentially result in accidents, cause injury to students and others, and saddle the school district or charter school with costly legal liabilities. School districts and charter schools need effective policies and methods designed to control the behavior of students while they are being transported. Individuals primarily responsible for ensuring the appropriate conduct of students should be involved in developing district/charter policies and behavior management techniques. A school district or charter school is responsible for the conduct of students on buses from the time students get on the bus until the time they leave the bus. School bus drivers assist in maintaining appropriate student behavior on school buses through various management techniques and by writing disciplinary referrals to principals when appropriate. Principals can assist bus drivers in maintaining student bus discipline by informing them of what disciplinary actions are taking place in response to written disciplinary referrals.

It is imperative that school districts and charter schools implement policies and procedures that ensure a student's right to due process while ensuring security and safety on the school bus.

17. The School District or Charter School should provide appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.

The proper use of technology can make the district/charter transportation function more efficient and safe, and less expensive. Technology can assist school districts and charter schools in mapping out the most efficient bus routes and can reduce the need to manually manipulate data. School districts and charter schools need appropriate technology to support their transportation systems. This includes providing computers to access databases to maintain data such as vehicle maintenance histories, fuel disbursements, and parts inventories.

The State Department of Education Division of School Transportation recommends that local transportation departments use automated systems, whenever possible, to assist in managing program operations and tracking vehicle repair costs, vehicle mileage, specific vehicle use from year to year (e.g., terrain, on-road vs. off-road, etc.), and fleet age, which would help in deciding when to replace (or repair) vehicles.

Districts and charters also need specialized diagnostic tools to accurately troubleshoot bus engine problems. In small districts, districts may be able to maintain some of this data manually, but most districts require computer systems to enable management to make more informed and appropriate decisions. Specialized diagnostic tools are another example where neighboring school districts and charter schools or other government agencies could cooperatively purchase or otherwise pool resources and manpower.

18. The School District or Charter School should monitor the fiscal condition of all transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against specific transportation budgets.

Like most other organizations, school districts and charter schools must make difficult decisions during the budget process to control expenses and maximize funds available to support their primary mission, i.e., educating students. Exceeding these budgets may require the district or charter to reduce funds to the classroom, forgo other needs, or to dip into reserves to meet unanticipated expenses. Thus, transportation management must monitor operations and control costs to ensure that budgets are not exceeded. Budget categories need to be sufficiently detailed to be useful to transportation managers and to state and regional student transportation specialists. Wide

variance between actual expenditures and budgeted expenditures indicates problems in either deriving accurate budgeted expenditure figures or controlling actual expenditures. In either case, transportation management can prevent budgeting problems through analysis of expenditures and comparing those expenditures to budgeted items. Such analyses will help alert transportation management to unexpected patterns of expenditures as well as identifying opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of operations. The State Department of Education Division of Student Transportation maintains cost trends for specific school transportation costs and annually posts all district/charter school transportation cost trends on a secure website. School districts and charter schools can compare their school transportation costs trends with similarly sized school districts and charter schools within Idaho.

19. The School District or Charter School should periodically review the advantages and disadvantages of privatizing its school transportation functions, as a whole or in part.

To be good custodians of public resources, school districts and charter schools should evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations continually, which includes examining the benefits of alternative service delivery methods, to reduce costs and maximize funds available for classroom instruction, and/or to improve performance. Certain administrative and support functions, including school transportation, are more easily privatized due to the limited scope operations and availability of private providers. Therefore, school districts and charter schools should conduct periodic analyses to determine if they would benefit from privatization of certain aspects of their transportation systems. Privatizing specialized functions such as rebuilding bus transmissions can save districts and charters money by avoiding the need to buy and maintain equipment and skills for a job that will only be used a few times a year. In some cases, districts/charters have privatized their entire transportation operations and achieved cost savings. However, these steps need to be taken only after “make or buy” analyses are done to ensure that the move will produce real benefits. To conduct these analyses, districts and charters need to identify their unit costs, both direct and indirect, of providing services (such as oil changes, paint and body work, and engine rebuilds) so that they can compare these costs to the prices charged by private vendors. Likewise, school districts and charter schools that currently contact should periodically analyze the advantages and disadvantages of both a district-owned operation and a contracted school transportation operation.

Pooling resources with neighboring school districts and charter schools or other government agencies for the purpose of performing large or expensive maintenance procedures (e.g., transmission or engine rebuilds, window repair, annual seat repairs, annual paint or body work, starter and alternator repair

work, etc.) is another operations technique where efficiencies could be maximized.

20. The School District or Charter School should establish an accountability mechanism for school transportation. The School District or Charter School should regularly track and make public reports on its performance in comparison to established benchmarks.

Like other publicly funded entities, a school district or charter school should be held accountable to parents and other taxpayers for the performance and cost of its major programs and support services, including transportation. To accomplish this, each school district or charter school should have a system that allows managers at both the district/charter and program level to evaluate performance and make informed decisions regarding the use of limited resources. In addition, school transportation departments need to be able to demonstrate to district management, school boards, and the public that they are good stewards of the public's funds and are constantly striving to improve. This can be done by establishing measures, goals, and benchmarks and comparing internal performance to other school districts and charter schools. Districts and charters should monitor some performance measures on a regular, short-term (e.g., monthly) basis such as the number of bus breakdowns, driver/technician absenteeism, complaints received (e.g., buses not being on time and students not picked up), vehicle maintenance (oil changes, inspections not conducted, etc.) delayed, and overtime paid.

Districts and charters should monitor other performance measures on an annual basis as well, such as the percentage of courtesy students served, annual operational cost per student, vehicle breakdowns per 100,000 miles, the percentage of buses used as spare buses, accidents per million miles, and the percentage of students delivered within established ride time standards.

The district or charter should compare its performance to those of peer districts as well as against established benchmarks. Transportation department performance should be reported on a regular basis to the district/charter superintendent, school board, and the public.