

New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools (NMCCS)-Kelly Callahan and Greta Roskom, Co-Executive Directors

The NMCCS solicited feedback from state charter schools that receive transportation funding. We asked them to share current issues/challenges they face in terms of student transportation funding.

An overall challenge for state charter schools is the fact that they are not restricted to the boundaries of the school district in which they physically reside. Students may enroll from anywhere in the state. This requires a state charter school offering transportation to calculate varied bus routes based on their individual student enrollment and their respective families' needs. Students may attend a charter school and reside outside of the school district's attendance area. Typically, a charter school finds a centralized stop(s) where students may be picked up and transported to school.

Locally chartered charter schools are restricted to providing bus service in the district's local attendance area; however, they may also enroll students who are outside of the physical boundaries of the school district.

Charter schools can choose not to provide transportation for students.

Specifically to APS, the largest school bus contractor went out of business and was taken over by APS. So, APS will provide their own bus service rather than contracting with a vendor.

The mission of charter schools is also a factor in determining transportation needs. (For example: SAMS has a mission around aviation and needs to be located near an airport; Albuquerque Sign Language Academy serves deaf and hard of hearing students.)

The NMCCS recommends evaluating school transportation funding formula processes to ensure equity for all district and charter school students receiving bus services, just like all other public school students, and adequate accountability for the funding.

Feedback from state charter schools receiving transportation funding who responded to NMCCS inquiry:**Albuquerque Sign Language Academy****Basic overview:**

- Transportation as a related service on our IEPs for qualifying students. Our program is unique and not offered through APS.
- Federal IDEA and ADA regulations have a huge impact on our transportation policy and practice.
- We offer door to door service for our highest needs students and create "super-stops" (along that home pick-up route) for regular education families who need transportation.
- We currently use 5 buses to serve the entire Albuquerque Metro, Rio Rancho, Bernalillo, East Mountains, Los Lunas, and Belen.

Challenges and issues:

- Because of the needs of our students, we work closely with the bus company to make sure all student accommodations are attended to. This includes being involved in the development of routes, taking into account the physical needs of particular students – including students who are susceptible to seizure.
- Procedural investment (minimal) in including transportation in the IEP process.
- We've had mixed success with bus monitors (assistants), but they are absolutely necessary and required given the nature of our students. Funding does not cover monitors for all buses.
- Discipline and bus "misfires" are all attended to by the school. Designated school personnel then call the bus company to solve any problems, answer any questions, or field complaints.
- Long bus rides for outlying kids.

LaTierra Montessori (Espanola)

- So far our transportation situation has been working well.
- The funds provided are crucial for our enrollment.

Explore Academy (Albuquerque)

- Explore Academy is heavily dependent on bus transportation. Since charters don't have a designated neighborhood-based geographical area, bus transportation is what allows us to provide choice for students to come to Explore Academy. Without that transportation element that choice is lost.
- Provides students choice to reach schools outside their local neighborhood. Drives charter enrollment.
- It's nearly impossible to compute/estimate funding without insight into the formula (PED Transportation doesn't allow us to calculate the most efficient routes based on funding, therefore there's no way to know how funding is calculated and thus cannot be predicted.)
- The current transportation formula does not adjust for growth. (As schools grow, school size can increase significantly from year to year. Using previous-year data does not help compensate for growth)
- The elimination of the 40th day adjustment (2017) will be detrimental as we tend to under-estimate enrollment.
- Challenge: Durham (in Albuquerque) was sold to APS, leaving insufficient alternatives (However, APS kept our contract for this coming year.)
- Challenge: Very difficult to manage own buses given the administrative responsibilities (thus, a bus company is best option).

Southwest Aeronautics, Mathematics and Science Academy (SAMS Academy)

SAMS Academy is located on 4100 Aerospace Pkwy. We are two miles from Double Eagle Airport. We are located behind The Three Sisters (The three volcanos in Petroglyph National Monument). We truly are in the middle of nowhere but yet we are a vital component to the community of Albuquerque. The bus service provided to our students is the lifeblood of our school. Our bus stops are strategically placed around the west side of the city to help families attend our school.

Below are key components to having the bus service provided to our school:

- More than half of our students ride the bus daily. Survey results show 156 students out of 280 rode the bus. Next year 229 of our students will be under the driving age, as a result more than half will continue to use the bus transportation provided.
- We are isolated, but we reach out to the entire community.
- Parents feel the buses are imperative to their child attending our school.
- Our educational model requires pick-up and drop-off twice a day.
- With our growing Aviation Program, our location near an airport is essential to the success of the program. Therefore, our buses are essential to this program as well.

La Promesa Elementary Learning Center

Challenges:

- There are not enough buses available to provide transportation for charters in Albuquerque. APS uses all the buses for transportation of their K-12 students.
- Coordinating with APS's bus schedules creates conflicts with our school schedule.
- Paying insurance for transportation adds to the overall costs to the school.
- It would be more cost effective and logistically efficient to be able to own our own buses and manage our bus service. We could share the costs among other charters. It would be less expensive to the state and to the charters.