



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Courtesy Busing

Jessica Lesperance [REDACTED]
To: bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com

Tue, Aug 8, 2023 at 10:05 AM

With the recent notice about subscription busing, I thought it would be helpful to share correspondence that I started with administration regarding courtesy busing back in March. As you will see, I eventually got one response but never any follow up after pushing for more clarification.

I would be very interested to know if we are continuing courtesy busing for students when we have told some families that are willing to pay for subscription busing that it is not available.

Courtesy busing is incredibly inequitable, it should be all or nothing. Either everyone in the district is offered courtesy busing, or we follow the state mandates and if you live within 2 miles you should pay for subscription busing.

Thanks,
Jessica

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Jessica Lesperance [REDACTED]
Date: May 8, 2023 at 4:35:26 PM EDT
To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>
Cc: Joy Young <jyoung@bhpsnj.org>, "Dr. Melissa Varley" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>, Julie Kot <jkot@bhpsnj.org>, Kelly Sheehan <ksheehan@bhpsnj.org>
Subject: Re: Courtesy Busing

Hi Ms. Penna,

Thank you for your response. I do have a couple of follow up questions in purple below.

What criteria qualifies a student for courtesy bussing?

There is no criteria for courtesy bussing in our district. The students who are at present receiving courtesy bussing are students who have been bussed solely under past practices. These are the students that the board will be re-evaluating during the 23/24 school year.

If there is no documented criteria, then it seems to me it's discretionary - so my question would be, who makes the decision as to who receives courtesy bussing and who does not? If this is the case, it certainly does not seem equitable.

If it's not discretionary, then there must be some sort of criteria, whether it be a list of addresses or street names - you mention students have been bussed under past practices, what are the past practices? If this is the case, I again request that you share what criteria qualifies a student for courtesy busing.

How would a parent know if their children qualify - does the district reach out proactively or is it up to a parent to ask?

Parents are notified each year during the registration period. I believe that registration started yesterday. Students that qualify to take the bus are asked to fill out a registration form - they have the option to utilize or waive taking the bus. Students that don't qualify are sent a subscription bus application form.

How often are these qualifications/guidelines reviewed?

The regulations are driven by the state and reviewed regularly by our transportation department.

My question was not regarding the regulations driven by the state, but rather the criteria surrounding courtesy busing in our district. If there are in fact guidelines/past practices, were these reviewed after the reconfiguration was completed. There are many families (including mine) who have had their "walkability" negatively impacted by the reconfiguration.

When was the last time these qualifications/guidelines were changed or updated?

Again, the regulations are driven by the state. We don't have that information, please reach out to them directly.

Again, this was in reference to courtesy busing in our district, not the state regulations.

In closing, I understand that the board has said they will re-evaluate courtesy busing next year. This is certainly something that needs to be done, but I would argue it can't wait until next year. We have had to make cuts to the budget and will ultimately have less teachers in our schools next year than we did this year as a result. My suggestion would be that anyone receiving courtesy busing should be asked to pay for busing like the subscription busing families. If they choose not to participate, then that is fine, but if they do, it helps generate some additional revenue for the district in an equitable fashion. Alternatively, I suggest you take a look at families that were impacted by the reconfiguration and provide them with courtesy busing - which will be more costly to the district.

Again, I appreciate your response and consideration.

Thank You,
Jessica

On Wed, Apr 26, 2023 at 9:46 AM Angela Penna [REDACTED] wrote:

Good morning Ms. Lesperance,

I apologize for my delayed response to your questions. They are in red below.

What criteria qualifies a student for courtesy bussing?

There is no criteria for courtesy bussing in our district. The students who are at present receiving courtesy bussing are students who have been bussed solely under past practices. These are the students that the board will be re-evaluating during the 23/24 school year.

How would a parent know if their children qualify - does the district reach out proactively or is it up to a parent to ask?

Parents are notified each year during the registration period. I believe that registration started yesterday. Students that qualify to take the bus are asked to fill out a registration form - they have the option to utilize or waive taking the bus. Students that don't qualify are sent a subscription bus application form.

How often are these qualifications/guidelines reviewed?

The regulations are driven by the state and reviewed regularly by our transportation department.

When was the last time these qualifications/guidelines were changed or updated?

Again, the regulations are driven by the state. We don't have that information, please reach out to them directly.

I hope that this helps to answer your questions.

On Tue, Apr 25, 2023 at 2:38 PM Jessica Lesperance [REDACTED] wrote:

Ms. Sheehan,

I am following up once again on my 2 previous emails, which I have yet to receive a response to. I'm also adding Dr. Varley and Ms. Kott in hopes that someone can provide me with the information I am requesting.

As bussing letters started being sent today it seems you have just gone through the process of evaluating each student in the district to identify who qualifies for mandated or courtesy bussing so these should be relatively simple questions to answer.

To reiterate my questions:

- What criteria qualifies a student for courtesy bussing?
- How would a parent know if their children qualify - does the district reach out proactively or is it up to a parent to ask?
- How often are these qualifications/guidelines reviewed?
- When was the last time these qualifications/guidelines were changed or updated?

I look forward to your response.

Thanks,
Jessica

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 20, 2023, at 12:56 PM, Jessica Lesperance [REDACTED] wrote:

Ms. Sheehan,

I'm following up on my previous email, which I have yet to receive a response to. Please provide answers to the following, and if you are not the appropriate person to answer these questions, please let me know who they should be directed to.

- What qualifies a student for courtesy bussing?
- How would a parent know if their children qualify - does the district reach out proactively or is it up to a parent to ask?
- How often are these qualifications/guidelines reviewed?
- When was the last time these qualifications/guidelines were changed or updated?

I look forward to your response.

Thank you,
Jessica Lesperance

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 31, 2023, at 9:39 AM, Jessica Lesperance [REDACTED] wrote:

Ms. Sheehan and BOE Members,

I was unable to attend last night's BOE Meeting, but was watching via Zoom. I have some questions regarding courtesy busing. In particular, what qualifies students for courtesy busing? I was unable to find anything on the school website that provides this information. Please provide a list of the qualifications. Additionally, I'd like to know how often these qualifications are reviewed and when was the last time they were changed.

We have 2 children, one in Kindergarten (Woodruff) and one in 3rd grade (Hughes). We live a few blocks away from Woodruff, and when we purchased our home, we thought our children would be able to walk to school through 5th grade. However, due to the redistricting, our children will now attend Hughes for Grades 3-5. Although we live within the 2 mile radius from Hughes, the walk from our home to Hughes is not a safe route, so we were left with 2 choices: we could either drop off and pick up our 3rd grader every day, or we could pay for subscription busing. Again, due to the redistricting, our boys will never attend the same school at the same time until they are in high school, so instead of doing 2 drop-offs and 2 pick-ups each day we opted to pay for subscription busing for our son that attends Hughes.

I'm sure there are many families in this district with similar situations. I heard last night that the board is open to reconsidering courtesy bussing, but they want to do their due diligence first – although it wasn't clear that anyone even knows what that should include. I don't recall the exact timeline of the re-districting/full day kindergarten implementation, but I believe it felt very quick. It seems that if we can redistrict and implement a full day kindergarten program in a matter of months, then we can certainly figure out new bus routes, etc. – which one would argue should be reviewed on a regular basis anyways.

I find it very disheartening that we are making budget cuts, reducing teachers and staff within the school buildings that directly impact our students, and asking parents to carry additional burden for athletic and club fees, but the board is not willing to cut courtesy busing, a service that is incredibly inequitable – especially to those of us that pay for subscription bussing. I applaud those of you that spoke about the need to review this immediately for this budget cycle, thank you! For those of you that think this should be tabled for now, I strongly urge you to reconsider.

Thank you and I look forward to your answers to my questions above.

Jessica Lesperance

Sent from my iPhone

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Kind regards,
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Angela Penna
President, Berkeley Heights Board of Education
Berkeley Heights Public Schools
apenna@bhpsnj.org