

**Report of the Special Legislative Commission to Study
Transportation for Afterschool and Childcare Programs**

June 2008

Executive Summary

The Special Legislative Commission to Study Transportation for Afterschool and Childcare Programs was created by the Rhode Island General Assembly on June 22, 2007. The purpose of the commission is to study:

- all matters related to the transportation system for afterschool and childcare programs including, but not limited to, transporting students from schools to and from afterschool and childcare programs,
- safety of children and youth,
- cost of transportation for programs, state regulations concerning transportation of students to and from afterschool and childcare programs,
- utilizing public transportation,
- afterschool and childcare program's resources for transporting children and youth to off-site locations for program activities;
- and to make recommendations on how to improve transportation of children and youth to and from afterschool and childcare programs in a cost-effective manner.

The commission met from March to June, 2008 and examined the challenges programs face and what is being done to support programs. The commission developed recommendations based on the discussions at the meetings and research conducted by the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance (RIASPA) on afterschool transportation.

The key findings of the report from RIASPA included:

- Without system level coordination, a significant amount of duplication and inefficiency exists in the current model.
- A dramatic increase in coordination and efficiency is needed in order to serve a greater number of students with current resources.
- A considerable investment in afterschool transportation is being made on the local level in Rhode Island by afterschool programs, schools, and parents.
- For the most part, these resources are not being managed at a community or regional level (a notable exception is the Providence After School Alliance, which is profiled as one of the case studies in the report).

The report stated that the “bottom line” is that the management of afterschool transportation resources is a functionality that is missing and sorely needed in Rhode Island. This functionality is meant to save financial resources and provide access to afterschool and child care programs for children and families where transportation is a barrier.

It is important to note that as the commission was meeting the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) was working with other state agencies to develop a statewide transportation system for all students. The statewide transportation system was legislated

by the General Assembly with a bill that was introduced in the 2006 session by Senator Paiva Weed. RIASPA and the commission worked closely with RIDE to have afterschool and child care programs included in the statewide transportation system.

The commission developed several recommendations on how to improve transportation for afterschool and child care programs:

- RIDE and the other state agencies developing the statewide transportation system should integrate afterschool and child care programs into the system as it develops and where appropriate.
- RIASPA should continue to work with RIDE to ensure that afterschool and child care programs are included in the statewide transportation system.
- A pilot program should be established in a city or town other than Providence to provide coordinated, universal transportation for afterschool and child care programs. This pilot will allow for a “test run” for how the statewide transportation system can include afterschool and child care programs.
- The statewide transportation system should be able to interact with the student tracking software afterschool and child care programs use, such as youthservices.net.
- Additional policy work by this commission may be needed to ensure that afterschool and child care programs are included in the statewide transportation system.

Introduction

RIASPA conducted a survey of its members in 2006 and found that transportation was one of the top three issues of concern to afterschool program directors. RIASPA also conducted a survey of parents and found 49% of parents said transportation was the reason their children did not participate in afterschool programs. This clearly spoke to a need for solutions to the issue of transportation for afterschool and child care programs.

To learn more about the issue and potential solutions, RIASPA commissioned a research study by the Acadia Consulting Group to look at Rhode Island transportation challenges, identify potential solutions and determine best practices.

Acadia conducted qualitative research with afterschool program providers and school district managers. A total of 102 people participated in the research. 71 afterschool program providers (representing 297 program sites) completed on-line surveys, representing a 40% response rate and 31 telephone surveys were conducted with business and transportation managers at 31 out of 35 school districts, representing an 86% response rate. Additionally Acadia identified national and state best practices and current Rhode Island regulations related to afterschool transportation.

The key findings of the study found that considerable investment in afterschool and child care transportation was already being made but that duplication and inefficiency of services exists in the current model. Transportation is not being managed at the

community or regional level and more coordination is needed to serve a greater number of students with current resources.

The study also reported several key findings from both school districts and afterschool programs. The most striking finding for school districts is that there is a perception among school districts that the time after school is not a core responsibility of schools. But surprisingly, a great many school districts do provide transportation to places other than the student's home. 58% of school districts interviewed reported that students are bused to alternate drop-off locations, including afterschool programs, upon parent request.

The coordination is mostly at the school level, rather than the district level and most districts reported they do not routinely track how many students participate in afterschool activities or how they get there. The study also reported that most business/transportation managers in school districts thought everything was working fine because the issue had not been brought to their attention.

Afterschool programs reported that about 77% of approximately 15,000 annual slots are filled. Most afterschool programs do not coordinate program start or end times with bus schedules. Program times are driven by school dismissal and parent needs. Many schools often have late buses which leave 1-2 hours after school dismissal and are not widely coordinated with afterschool program end times. Most afterschool programs end between 5:00 and 6:00, well after the late bus has already left the school.

Many afterschool providers said that school drop-off locations should be expanded and that the late bus should be coordinated with program end times. One afterschool community-based program director expressed frustration with the fact that school buses actually drive by the front door of her program and the buses aren't allowed to stop. Very often afterschool programs must send out vans to pick up children, adding additional cost and contributing to Rhode Island's rush hour traffic, which can often start as early as 3:00 in the afternoon.

Acadia Consulting Group also looked at several national models for afterschool transportation and discovered that one of the best examples is right here in Rhode Island. The Providence After School Alliance (PASA) has developed a transportation system that cities across the nation have looked to as a model for best practice for afterschool transportation. PASA is working to streamline and integrate all afterschool functions, including the late bus, into one coordinated transportation system. PASA nearly doubled attendance of middle school participants when they implemented "universal" transportation for all students. PASA estimates that the coordination of transportation could result in an approximate 200% increase in students on late buses with only about a 25% incremental cost.

Acadia Consulting Group made several recommendations in the research study. They recommended that management functionality be created to collect, track, and use data for planning afterschool transportation and those transportation resources be managed at a

state and regional/local level. They also recommended identifying unused capacity, duplication and inefficiencies and that communication channels be clear and open among schools, programs and other community partners.

Acadia Consulting Group recommended that the state of Rhode Island design a statewide student transportation system and manage and coordinate transportation resources on a state level. Acadia also recommended that a database of statewide transportation resources be developed and the transportation system be implemented with school districts, afterschool programs and regional or local afterschool alliances.

Acadia recommended that school districts and afterschool programs work collaboratively with the state to implement the statewide transportation system and coordinate transportation day-to-day at the community and school level.

Finally, Acadia recommends that a possible pilot program similar to PASA's work on transportation be established in another area of the state and be used as an incubator.

The Legislative Commission

The Special Legislative Commission to Study Transportation for Afterschool and Childcare Programs met four times from March to June, 2008 and was chaired by Senator Paul V. Jabour (D-District 5, Providence) and Representative Susan Story (R-District 66, Barrington, East Providence). See appendix A for the full membership of the commission.

The charge of the commission was to explore ways that can improve transportation for afterschool and child care programs, either legislatively or regulatory. The commission looked at challenges facing programs and what is currently being done to support programs and then develop recommendations which will be included in a final report from the commission.

The commission heard presentations from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) on plans for the statewide transportation system and how afterschool and child care programs would be included. RIDE informed the commission that they hired a consultant, Management Partnership Services, Inc. (MPS), to implement the statewide transportation system. MPS recommended that the system start in January, 2009 and include initially all out-of-district student transportation. Full implementation of all in-district and out-of-district students would begin with the 2009-2010 school year. Transportation for afterschool and child care programs would be included in the full implementation of the transportation system in 2009-2010.

PASA also made a presentation on their work to bring universal transportation to their programming for middle school students. One of the highlights is that PASA was able to double the number of students in their program for only an incremental cost. One of the tools that PASA uses to increase efficiency is youthservices.net, a web-based data collection and program evaluation software. [Youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net) allows PASA to generate

reports on where each child is supposed to go on a given day, thereby allowing PASA to transport students more efficiently. Another benefit of PASA's work with transportation is that students held after school for detention can be involved in PASA's programs. PASA has found that the students who were in detention and participated in PASA improved their behavior and had less detention. One of the most important pieces of the transportation issue, PASA said, is to have someone located at the school to coordinate transportation for afterschool programs. Another important factor is the good relationship PASA established with Director of Transportation for Providence schools.

Overall, there was a general consensus among the commission that that the culture of schools must be changed to recognize that they have a responsibility for students after they leave the school also. Many districts already do this but not all districts see transportation to afterschool and child care programs as part of their responsibility.

Recommendations

1. Integrate afterschool and child care programs into the statewide transportation system.

It is fortuitous timing that the commission came together just as RIDE and other state agencies were beginning the process of developing a statewide transportation system as legislated by Senator Paiva Weed's bill, S 2489A. RIDE saw the importance of including transportation for afterschool and child care programs and agreed to include the programs in their creation of the statewide system.

The commission is very grateful to RIDE and the other state agencies developing the statewide system for recognizing the need to include transportation for afterschool and child care programs. Having afterschool and child care programs included in the system ultimately solves many of the challenges the commission recognized that programs face when it comes to transportation.

2. RIASPA should continue to work with RIDE to include afterschool and child care programs into the statewide system.

The commission also recommends that RIASPA continue to work with RIDE on the implementation of the statewide transportation system. RIASPA can provide the needed data for RIDE to incorporate afterschool and child care programs into the system.

3. Establish a pilot program for afterschool and child care program transportation.

The commission additionally recommends that a pilot program be established in a city or town other than Providence to provide coordinated, universal transportation for afterschool and child care programs.

Establishing a pilot program will allow for a "test run" for how the statewide transportation system can include afterschool and child care programs. PASA already has a great example of how it can be done working with the Providence school district but having another community establish a transportation program for all of its afterschool and child care programs will help work out any problematic issues that are inherent to

establishing a new system. This will provide a good road map for the statewide transportation system for including afterschool and child care programs.

4. The statewide transportation system should be able to interact with program's tracking software.

The commission recommends that the statewide transportation system be able to interact with the student tracking software afterschool and child care programs use, such as youthservices.net. Knowing the location a student needs to be picked up at and dropped off is crucial for the statewide system to work. Being able to gather data from afterschool child care programs is needed for this to happen.

5. Additional policy work may be needed.

Finally, additional policy work by this commission and RIASPA may be needed to ensure that as issues arise when implementing the statewide transportation system that afterschool and child care programs are included in the system.

Conclusion

Including afterschool and child care programs in the statewide transportation system will have many positive ramifications for the state of Rhode Island. Many students need a place they can go after school that is safe, inspires learning and offers them the opportunity to interact with their peers. In addition, parents need to feel confident that their children are not in harm's way while they are at work. The statewide transportation system will help ensure all of these things happen.

There is a need to change the current perception of transportation for afterschool and child care programs. The state and school districts need to move away from the thought that its responsibility for students ends when the school bell rings and recognize that afterschool and child care programs play a vital part in both the education and safety of our children. Including afterschool and child care programs in the statewide transportation system is a great step towards changing this perception.

There is great potential for a significant increase in the number of students participating in afterschool and child care programs with the implementation of the stateside transportation system. For this reason the commission strongly urges that the recommendations of this report be implemented.

Appendix A

Commission Members

Representative Grace Diaz
(D-District 11, Providence)

Senator Paul Jabour
(D-District 5, Providence)

Representative Susan Story
(R- District 66, Barrington, East
Providence)

Senator Leo Blais (Denise Saran
representing)
(R- District 21, Coventry, Scituate, Foster)

Christine Arouth
Carey Elementary School (21st CCLC)

Charlotte Boudreau
RI School Age Child Care Association

Kristy L.S. Leveille
Boys and Girls Club of Providence,
Olneyville Branch

Jeff Taylor
State Alliance of Rhode Island YMCAs

Erin Gilliatt
Boys and Girls Club of East Providence

Fran Gallo
RI Superintendant's Association

Sarah Cahill
RI Afterschool Plus Alliance

John DiTomaso
RI Department of Motor Vehicles

Hillary Salmons/Patrick Duhon
Providence After School Alliance

Jackie Ascrizzi/George McDonough
RI Department of Elementary and
Secondary Education

Kathy Sandberg
RI Child Care Directors Association

Mark Therrien
RI Public Transit Authority