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2006: SB26

MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education

FROM: Nancy Whynot
Director
Business Services Branch

DATE: December 7, 2006

SUBJECT: Update on Student Transportation Reforms

Further to Memorandum 2006:SB13, dated July 11, 2006, I am writing to provide details on the student transportation reforms being implemented by the government, and more specifically, information about Phase One Effectiveness & Efficiency (E&E) Reviews on established consortia.

As indicated in the 2006-07 Grants for Student Needs announcement, the objectives of the reforms are to build capacity to deliver safe, effective and efficient student transportation services, achieve an equitable approach to funding and reduce the administrative burden of delivering transportation, thus allowing school boards to focus on student learning and achievement.

The reforms include a requirement for consortia, E&E reviews on established consortia, and a cost benchmark study for a 72 passenger school bus, incorporating standards for safe vehicles and trained drivers. This memo outlines the progress that has been made to date, and provides more information on each component of the reform process.

Working Groups

In communications to the sector in July 2006, the Ministry indicated that it would be soliciting involvement from the sector to create working groups to assist in the implementation of the reform approach. Since then, the Ministry has formed two separate working groups, the Transportation Advisory Team (TAT) and the Consortia Plan Review Team (CPRT).

The Transportation Advisory Team, with representation from school boards and operators, has been formed to assist Ministry staff in preparing for the E&E reviews. Over the last three months the team developed a draft E&E Review Guide, which was shared with the sector on November 9, 2006. Members of the team also assisted

Ministry staff in reviewing the proposals that were received from consultants in response to a Request for Resources (RFR) and a Request for Proposals (RFP) issued by the Ministry. The successful consultants will work as an integral part of the team that will conduct E&E reviews on consortia.

A Consortia Plan Review Team has also been formed, with representatives from CODE, Mary Jean Gallagher, and COSBO, Isabel Grace. Jo-Anne Harrison, a respected and experienced transportation manager from the Sudbury Student Services Consortium is also a member of the review team. Since the group's first meeting in September they have worked with Ministry staff to develop the assessment templates that are being used to review consortia plans, as well as exemption requests from French-language boards. The team is also responsible for reviewing consortia plans using the assessment template, and making a decision on the acceptability of each plan. In all cases the decision of the team, and comments, will be forwarded to boards within a consortium.

Requirements for Consortia

As outlined in Memorandum 2006:SB13, boards were required to submit consortia plans to the Ministry by November 17, 2006. At present, 23 site plans have been received, of which 18 have been reviewed and 10 have been approved. Further to this, 11 sites have requested an extension from the Ministry and have committed to submitting their plan by a specified date. Another meeting of the Consortia Plan Review Team will be scheduled to complete the review of remaining plans.

The Ministry will remain engaged with school boards over the next two years in order to monitor the progress of consortia development and to ensure that developing consortia are meeting the milestones outlined in their plans.

E&E Review Team

As mentioned above, the Ministry has procured the services of two consultants to form the E&E review team that will undertake reviews of selected consortia. The management consultant that will head up the review team is Deloitte and Touche LLP. In addition, Management Partnership Services Inc. was the successful routing and technical consultant. The Ministry has also seconded Jo-Anne Harrison from the Sudbury Student Services Consortium to provide on-the-ground knowledge and expertise during the reviews.

E&E Reviews

Once the Ministry is satisfied a site has achieved full consortia status, the consortium will be contacted to arrange an E&E review. The reviews will gather evidence to ensure that transportation is being administered, planned, and delivered effectively and efficiently. They will also facilitate an assessment of the transportation needs of each consortium based on consistent reference standards. Although subject to

refinements that will be made by the E&E review team prior to phase one, an E&E review guide was sent to all boards on November 9, 2006 in order to solicit feedback and provide an outline of the types of data that will be analyzed during the reviews. A final version of the E&E review guide will be shared with the sector once it has been refined by the E&E review team.

Phase One

Four sites have been selected for Phase One reviews. The timeline for this phase of reviews will be from December 2006 to the end of February 2007. The four selected sites are:

- Student Transportation Services of Central Ontario – Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB, PVNC CDSB, CSD catholique Centre-Sud
- Transportation Consortium #12 – Peel DSB, Dufferin-Peel CDSB
- Rainy River Transportation Services – Rainy River DSB, Northwest CDSB
- Wellington-Dufferin Student Transportation Consortium – Upper Grand DSB, Wellington CDSB, Dufferin-Peel CDSB (in Dufferin County), CSD catholique Centre-Sud, CSD Centre-sud Ouest

In general, selection of sites for phase one E&E reviews was based on the following principles:

- Joint consortium plan was submitted to the Ministry on or before the November 17 deadline;
- Plan was approved by the CPRT at its meeting held on November 22, 2006 (i.e. the consortium has met all requirements for consortia outlined in Memorandum 2006:SB13);
- Ministry has confirmed that the consortium is technically ready for a review

In cases where consortia may have met these criteria but were not selected for a phase one review, Ministry staff will be in contact with the consortium to outline the tentative timeline for additional reviews, which will be conducted during 2007 and 2008.

Cost Study

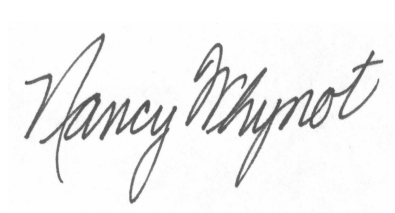
To ensure the delivery of safe, effective and efficient student transportation service, the government will engage a third party to conduct a cost benchmark study for school buses incorporating standards for safe vehicles and trained drivers. The findings of this study will complement the E&E reviews and provide additional information as the government considers adjustments to funding. Ministry staff are currently in the process of finalizing the terms of the review and will be releasing an RFR in the coming weeks. It is anticipated that the cost benchmark study will be completed by the end of March, 2007.

Assistance

Ministry staff are available to answer questions and provide support throughout the reporting process. Boards are encouraged to contact staff if they have questions or comments about any aspects of the transportation reform process.

Please direct any questions to Sandy Chan at (416) 325-2464 (sandy.chan@ontario.ca).

We look forward to working with school boards and the student transportation sector throughout this project.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Whynot". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nancy Whynot
Director
Business Services Branch

cc. Superintendents of Business
Transportation Managers